

**SLEIGH BELLS  
IN  
THE SNOW**

By  
Bob Clark







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## IN MEMORY

OF

BEVERLY



IN MEMORY

OF

RECENTLY



## CHAPTER 1

In Central Iowa, Sunday, December 7, 1941 was a warm sunny day. After doing chores on the farm and eating an early afternoon family dinner, my younger brother, Paul, and I set out on foot for Ames, a good 5 miles to the southeast. Paul was 17 and I was 18. We were about the same height, 5 foot, 7 inches. Weights were right at 135. He had black hair and brown eyes, resembling my father. I had dark hair and blue eyes, as did my mother.

We had walked nearly half a mile along the gravel road that ran in front of our house when we heard a car approaching from the rear. We looked back to see Ed Riley, a man in his early 30s who lived at his family's farm a good mile north of our farm, driving his new gray Ford. Ed, one of three sons, worked as sales representative for Ames Reliable, the grain elevator at the little railroad town of Ontario, located about a half mile south of our farm. The Riley's always gave "hitch-hiking" kids a lift in those depression days.

Ed stopped. Paul rushed to sit up front. I got into the back seat of the new sedan.

As usual, Ed's first question was, "Where are you guys going?"

"To the show," Paul quickly snapped.

"The Collegian," I chimed in.

Mentioning the Collegian Theater told Ed we were going all the way to downtown Ames and not just to one of the two closer movie theaters at Campus Town.

"We sure appreciate the ride, Ed," I injected.

"You guys are always welcomed. You know that. What's Bruce up to?" Ed asked, referring to the brother a year older than me.

"Oh, he's working for a guy who repairs grain elevators," I said.

"They're workin' in Northern Iowa and Minnesota right now," Paul added.

"Your dad still out West?"

"Yeah," Paul and I answered simultaneously.

"Where is he out there?"

"Idaho," Paul replied.

"He's remodelin' my aunt's house out there," I explained.

"And that's ... uh ... your dad's ... sister?"

"Yep," Paul came back.

"And, you guys are stuck with all the farm work, huh?"

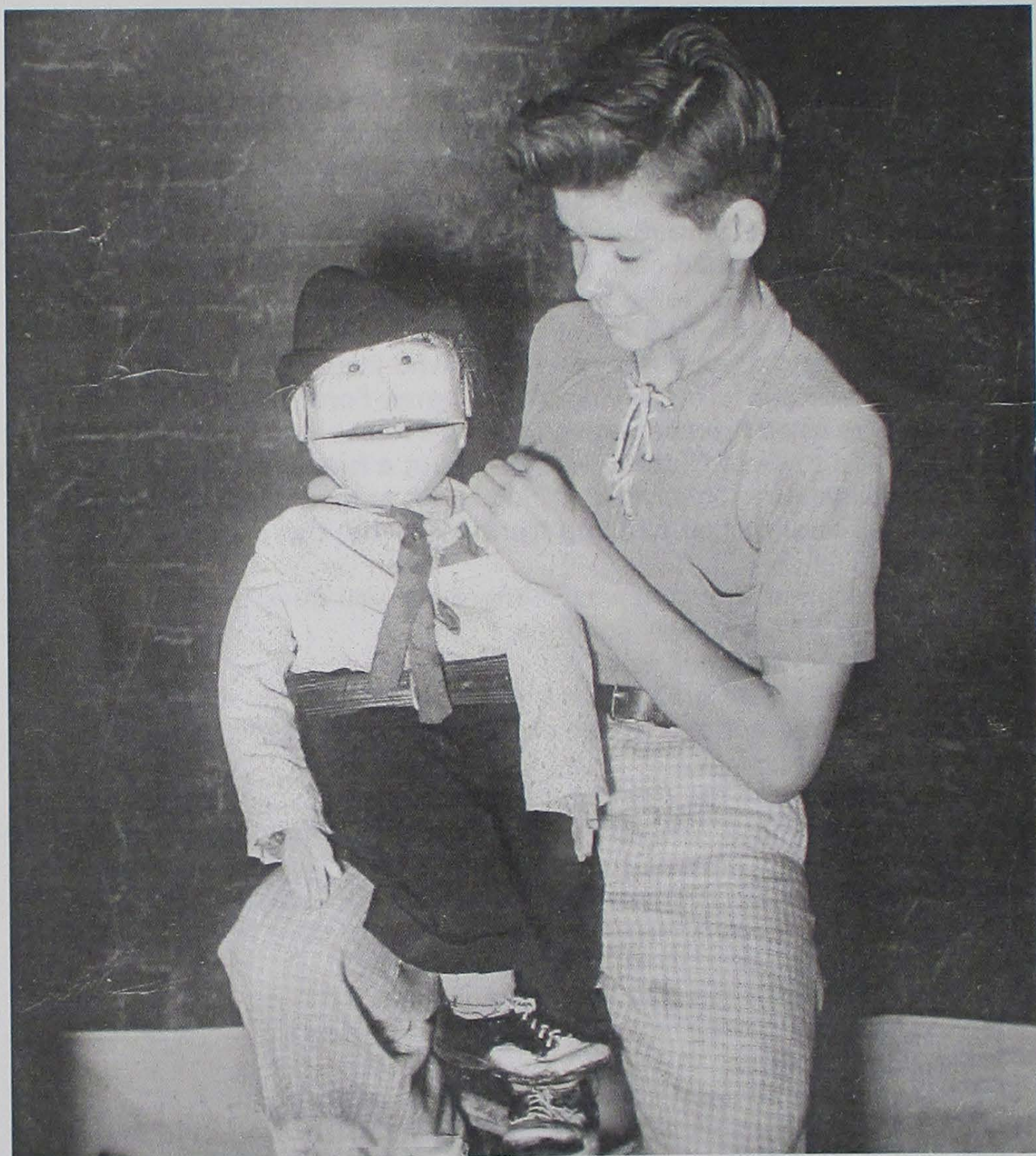
"Yep," replied Paul.

"You still throwing your voice, Bob?"

"Now and then."

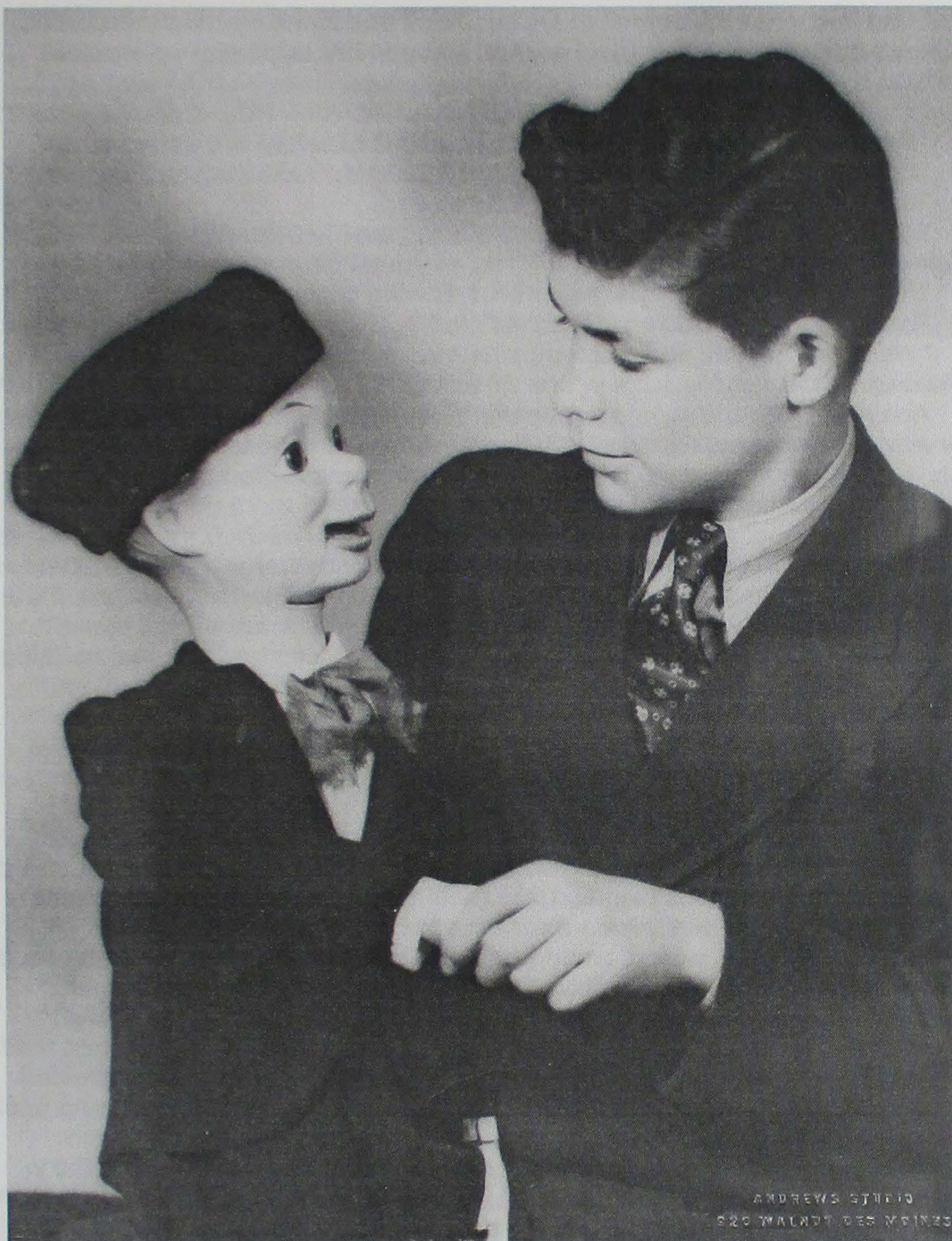


In 1937, I had built a ventriloquist dummy, first entertaining before a P. T. A. program at Ontario School, March 5<sup>th</sup>. I had been asked to appear at various functions statewide and in Illinois, including presentations on a number of Iowa radio stations, resulting in money for helping with family expenses.



At WHO's Saturday night "Iowa Barn Dance Frolic," Bob Williams, oldest of the Williams Brothers Quartet, placed the wooden box his little brother, Andy, stood on to reach the microphone in front of the mike for Jerry and me. I placed my right foot on the box so the dummy could sit on my knee.





**The management at radio station, WHO, in Des Moines,  
presented Bob with a new dummy in 1938.  
He named him Larry.**



I had become accustomed to well wishers' questions on the subject, but avoided bringing up the subject myself. I hoped my quick answer would suffice.

"I don't know how your mom handles all that work. How many kids now?"

"Eleven," I answered routinely.

"And your mom had a baby that died," Ed said. "How long ago was that?"

"Back in '36," I answered. "Five years ago."

Ed drove right up in the front of the Collegian Theater at the west end of Main Street and stopped the car.

"If ya need a lift home, I may still be around when you guys get out."

"Hope so!" Paul shouted. "Thanks!"

"We'll look for ya!" I called, stepping out of the car and closing the door. "Thanks, Ed."

About halfway through the picture, the house lights illuminated the theater. Manager Joe Gebrach, a tall, gaunt man of dark complexion in his mid-forties, who was always seen wearing a business suit, hurried up the left stage steps, walked briskly to center stage and stood there. He broke an uneasy silence.

"It was just reported on the radio that the American Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, has been attacked by Japanese bombers. The report said the damage to our navy there is devastating. I thought you should all know."

Joe turned to his right and left the stage the way he entered. A disturbing murmur swept over the half-filled theater. A number of people got up and left. Paul and I remained in our seats, looking around us at those leaving. The houselights dimmed. All became quiet. The film commenced again. We watched it to the end.

I continued piecing Joe's echoing words together. "Naval Base" . . . "devastating" . . . "Japanese bombers" . . . "Pearl Harbor." Just where is Pearl Harbor, anyway?

Once the film ended, Paul and I hurried from the theater with the same intensity of the other departing theater patrons.

On the way out I looked around for Joe Gebrach, who I thought may be in the lobby dispensing late word on the surprise attack. I knew Joe would recognize me. A few short years before, he had served as master of ceremonies, introducing me as one of the talent contestants in a contest held on the stage of the Collegian Theater the night of its grand opening. He had handed me a \$10 bill as first prize. Joe was nowhere to be seen in the theater lobby.

Paul and I walked east along Main Street, watching the moving traffic in search of Ed Riley or anyone who may be driving west toward Campus Town or to the Ontario area. We spied Ed's new gray Ford parked in front of the Montgomery Ward store on the north side of the street. Being Sunday, the store was closed.

As we loitered on the sidewalk near Ed's car, watching the moving traffic, we saw a man jaywalking toward us from across the street.



"Did you hear the news?" Ed shouted.

Paul and I rushed toward him.

"The Japs hit our fleet!" Ed exclaimed. He walked hurriedly toward his car. We followed.

"Joe stopped the movie to tell us." Paul said.

"I hope you guys are ready to go home, I'm not sure they had the radio on at home."

"We don't have a radio right now," I said.

"Battery's down," added Paul.

Ed provided details of the attack as he drove. Neither Paul nor I was certain where Pearl Harbor was. Ed did his best to explain, although he wasn't sure how far it was from the California coast. He stopped at our mailbox. Paul and I thanked Ed for the lift and got out of the car. Anxious to get home, Ed pulled away abruptly. Paul and I ran across the lawn and bounded the concrete front steps on the east side of the house.

"Mom, Mom!" we shouted, pulling the screen door open.

We spied Mom in the living room, located left of the entrance. She stood beside the upright piano in a familiar stance; one hip extended providing a resting place for our little brother, Roger, a baby less than eight months old.

"Pearl Harbor was bombed!" I said, out of breath.

"What?!" she said.

"The Japs did it!" Paul quickly emphasized.

"My God!" She exclaimed, scowling. "Where did you hear that?"

She leaned down, releasing Roger to crawl on the living room rug.

"They stopped the movie," I replied. "Joe Gebrach got up on the stage and announced it."

"He heard about it on the radio," said Paul. "Ed Riley said it means war!"

A number of my younger brothers and sisters had gathered around, trying to understand the excitement.

"Maybe George'll call tonight," Mom said.

We knew that Dad calling from Idaho may end in failure, due to static on the telephone line with low voice volume.

"Bruce is nearly twenty," Mom calculated. "He'll have to go."

"Go where, Mom?" asked Marj, 13, her bright blue eyes looking up at Mom.

"Go off to war," Mom answered, automatically stroking Marjorie Ann's long blond, well kept hair. "Probably Bob, too."

"Why, Mom?" asked 11 year old Danny, another blue-eyed blond.

"Well . . . we're now in the war," she went on, "and the older boys . . ."  
Mom hesitated. "Maybe George will call."

She leaned over, picking up Roger, then turned and walked through the lobby into the dining room, followed by half a dozen kids. Paul and I went back outside and started evening chores.

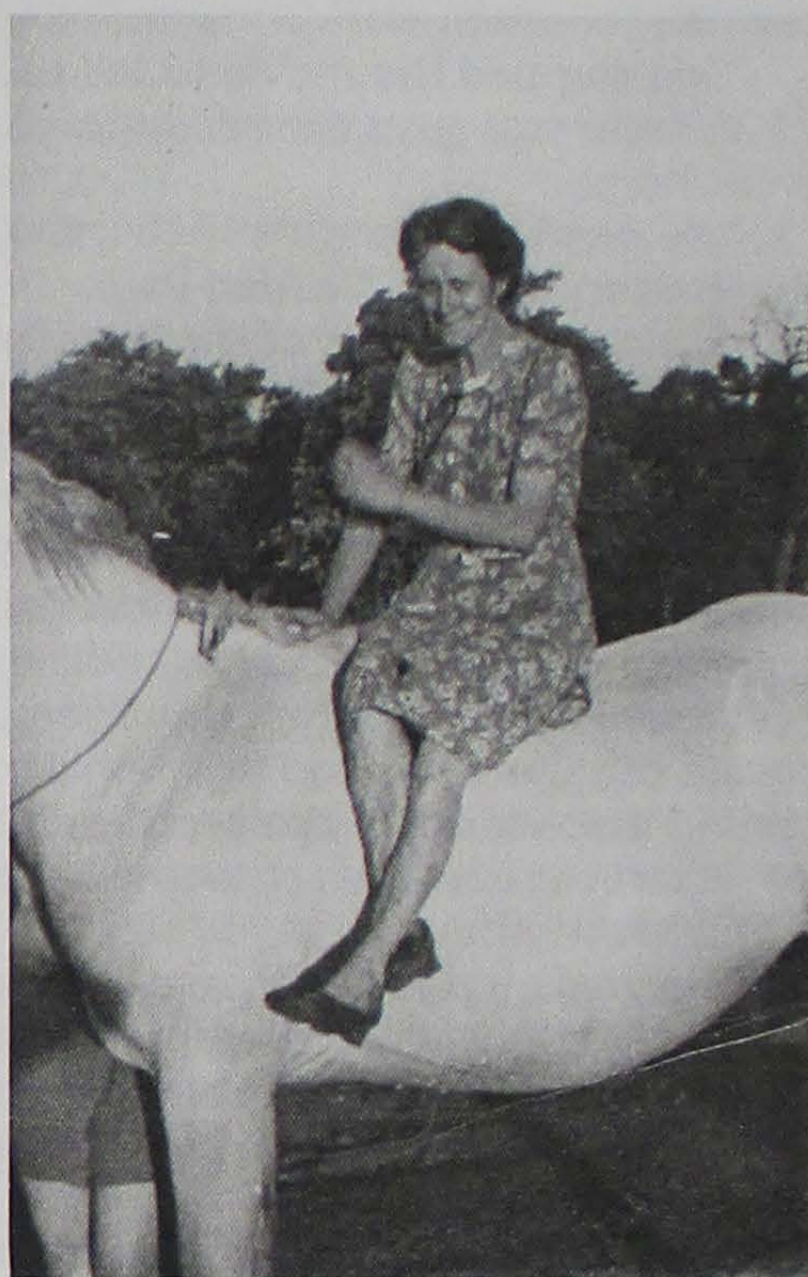
My mother's name was Vera. She had no middle name. She was a short, slight, blue-eyed woman with brownish-black hair often worn up in a bun.



Her normal weight, altered by frequent pregnancies, was right at 100 pounds.



**Vera (Dott's) Clark**



**Vera in the '40s**

Mom had earned a teacher's certificate at Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls and taught school at a small town near Chariton, country seat of Lucas County in south central Iowa.

Dad, George Alfred Clark, was close to six feet tall, with light brown eyes and black hair, weighing over 200 pounds. He often told us kids stories of his youth, working in southern Iowa coal mines with his father, then going into the army during World War I, nearly dying in France, then coming back and serving as apprentice carpenter.

Dad met Mom at the Chariton Christian Church prior to Dad's leaving for service in World War I. She stood before the congregation, admonishing those in the crowd who had spread vicious rumors about a friend of hers.

Dad admired her spunk. They began dating and continued seeing each other until Dad left for military service at Camp Dodge, northwest of Des Moines.





In 1917, Dad advanced to field artillery sergeant, instructing camouflage and mining. Just prior to Armistice Day, he drank water that he later learned



had filtered down from an old French cemetery, resulting in a severe case of typhoid fever. The illness nearly cost him his life. He was hospitalized in France while other American soldiers were returning to the states.

After returning home from overseas, Dad went to work as a carpenter's apprentice for Chariton builder, John Lions, constructing farm buildings, homes, churches and commercial buildings throughout southern and southwestern Iowa. My parents were married September 5, 1920, at the Chariton Christian Church. Dad was then 27 and Mom, 22.

### **The Alfred and Eva Clark family**



**Front: Esther, Eva, Jessie, Alfred and Mable  
Back row: Earl, George and Roy**



In 1921, Dad's younger brother, Roy, who had also served in the army during World War I, was enrolled at Iowa State College in Ames, near the state's geographical center. He was taking advantage of a federal veteran's program also available to my dad. My parents caught a train at Chariton. Roy had a friend who owned a car. The two of them drove to Nevada, county seat of Story County, located nine miles east of Ames, picking up my parents at the railroad depot upon their arrival to central Iowa.

Dad immediately went to a lumberyard in Ames, explaining he had just arrived from southern Iowa where he had been in construction and would be building homes in Ames. First came solving the need for money. The lumberyard owner knew a man whose daughter had money to loan.

Dad borrowed \$500 from the lady, established credit at the lumberyard and bought the southeast corner of a cornfield, located a few blocks south of the Iowa State College campus. There Dad built his first home in Ames, a 10' x 12' one-room tarpaper shack, later adding on to it. The tarpaper was held in place by strips of lath. Morning Glories grew up the sides. Light colored lath and white flowers made the house resemble a large package wrapped in black paper with light ribbon and white blossoms. The tiny home stood back a ways from Knapp Street on the west edge of the huge lot, leaving room for constructing two normal sized homes.

The "little house," as we called it, faced east toward Farrow's large two story white house. A fence separated the two properties.

Bruce, a blue-eyed blond, was born in the "little house" on Dad's birthday, January 8, 1922. Dad attended college, taught woodworking there and built and remodeled homes in his spare time. The following year, February 12, 1923, I was born in the little house.

Thurlow Hoover, his wife and teen-age daughter, Mary Mae, lived just to the west. Mom took me with her to visit Mrs. Hoover and Mary Mae. Their kitchen table was covered with a blue oilcloth. I thought it smelled like butter. Thurlow was known to drink "Bathtub Gin."

Mom often sat at the dresser with a center mirror and hinged wing mirrors, one on each side of the center mirror. By moving the winged mirrors, all sides of a person could be seen. She used a little rouge and face powder only and wore her hair up in a bun at the back of her head.

My parents had an RCA radio with a horn-like speaker. It bore the famous little black and white dog and speaker emblem bearing the slogan, "His Master's Voice." We listened to classical music from WOI, a newly licensed radio transmitter at the Engineering Building a few blocks away on the campus. It had no tower. An antennae wire was stretched west from the building across to the first metal water tower to be erected west of the Mississippi. We got to know WOI's top radio personality, Andy Wolfries, by his familiar deep resonant voice. At night, Dad also picked up KDKA, Pittsburgh. We listened to music from WHO, the 50,000 watt clear channel station in Des Moines, over the big speaker. The announcers said, "WHO ... *who* ... Des Moines." The station's logo was an owl.



Dad had an excellent singing voice and often sang as he worked. He knew most of the lyrics to songs such as "My Blue Heaven," "Side-By-Side," "Blue Skies," "Yes, We Have No Bananas," "Heart of My Heart," "When the Red, Red Robin Goes Bob, Bob, Bobbin' Along," "Sonny, Boy," "Over There," "There's a Long, Long Trail," "O, How I Hate to Get up in the Morning" and many others. He often held us kids on his lap and sang. We picked up the words and tunes from him very early in life.

Dad was active in American Legion Post 37 in Ames. Each Memorial Day and Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>, Dad donned his war uniform and served on the legion firing squad. We young ones watched him wrap the olive drab colored strap-like fabric he called leggings, adjust the chin strap of the metal helmet, set it to rest squarely on his head and raised a rifle to his shoulder, often displaying the "Manual of Arms." The nights following participation in the firing squads, Dad told us stories of his war activities. We became familiar with names of men he'd been with overseas, among them, Sergeant Buskirk and Lieutenant Colling.

Dad built a house on the east-west alley just north of the little house. We got our first telephone. It was black with a round base and foot tall perpendicular metal tube with a shot glass shaped mouthpiece and forked chrome metal cradle for the black elongated bell-shaped receiver on top. A dangling cord connected the receiver to the phone base. The Clark residence telephone number was 1219J. We moved into the house before it was finished. It had a stucco outer coat. We called that home by two different names, the "stucco house" and the "house on the alley." Brown-eyed, black-haired Paul was born there May 22, 1924.



**Bob on front steps of Grandma Clark's (and Uncle Earl's) home, Chariton, Iowa in mid twenties.**



Dad's youngest brother, Earl, a shoe repairman in Chariton, and his new wife, Bess, visited us in that home at Christmas. My present that year was a new black and red kiddy-car Dad had created. Paul was placed in the same black baby carriage my parents had used to wheel first Bruce, then me from place to place.

Wilbur Greer, a professor at the college, and his bride, Gladys, rented the stucco house from my parents. We moved back into the little house. Dad built another house just south and slightly east of the little house. Its address was – and is – 2611 Knapp Street. Bill Kaufman, a painting contractor who had worked with Dad on many jobs, painted the new house brown. We called it, of all things, the "brown house." Our "stand-up" telephone was installed there.

Dad occasionally gave Mom a driving lesson in their maroon Durant sedan. He convinced Mom she knew how to drive well enough to make it to her doctor's appointment. He drove his flatbed Model T Ford truck to work. Shortly before appointment time, Mom loaded we three boys into the car. Bruce, being the oldest, sat in the front seat to give Mom any assistance she might need. Paul sat in the back seat behind Mom. I was supposed to sit on the right side of the back seat. I couldn't sit. I had to stand and watch.

Mom was short, so she could barely press the clutch pedal down and see over the windshield at the same time. She turned the key on the dashboard and stepped on the floorboard starter. The motor started. Pushing the clutch pedal to the floor was much more difficult. The gears ground as she tried to press the long gearshift into the proper position. Once in low gear the clutch jumped. The car lurched forward. The motor died. She fought the clutch and gearshift to get it back into neutral. We all laughed.

"Now, you kids be quiet," Mom pleaded. "I have my hands full here."

When all was quiet, she went through the start-up procedure again. Once in gear, the car slowly moved ahead, then lurched. We boys toppled, laughing louder than before. The motor chugged. The car lurched and rocked repeatedly. Mom extended her right foot to the gas pedal and the lurching gradually dissipated. The old Durant slowly gained speed. Mom was very nervous. She strained to see over the dashboard between the spokes of the steering wheel. We kids thoroughly enjoyed Mom's endless misery.

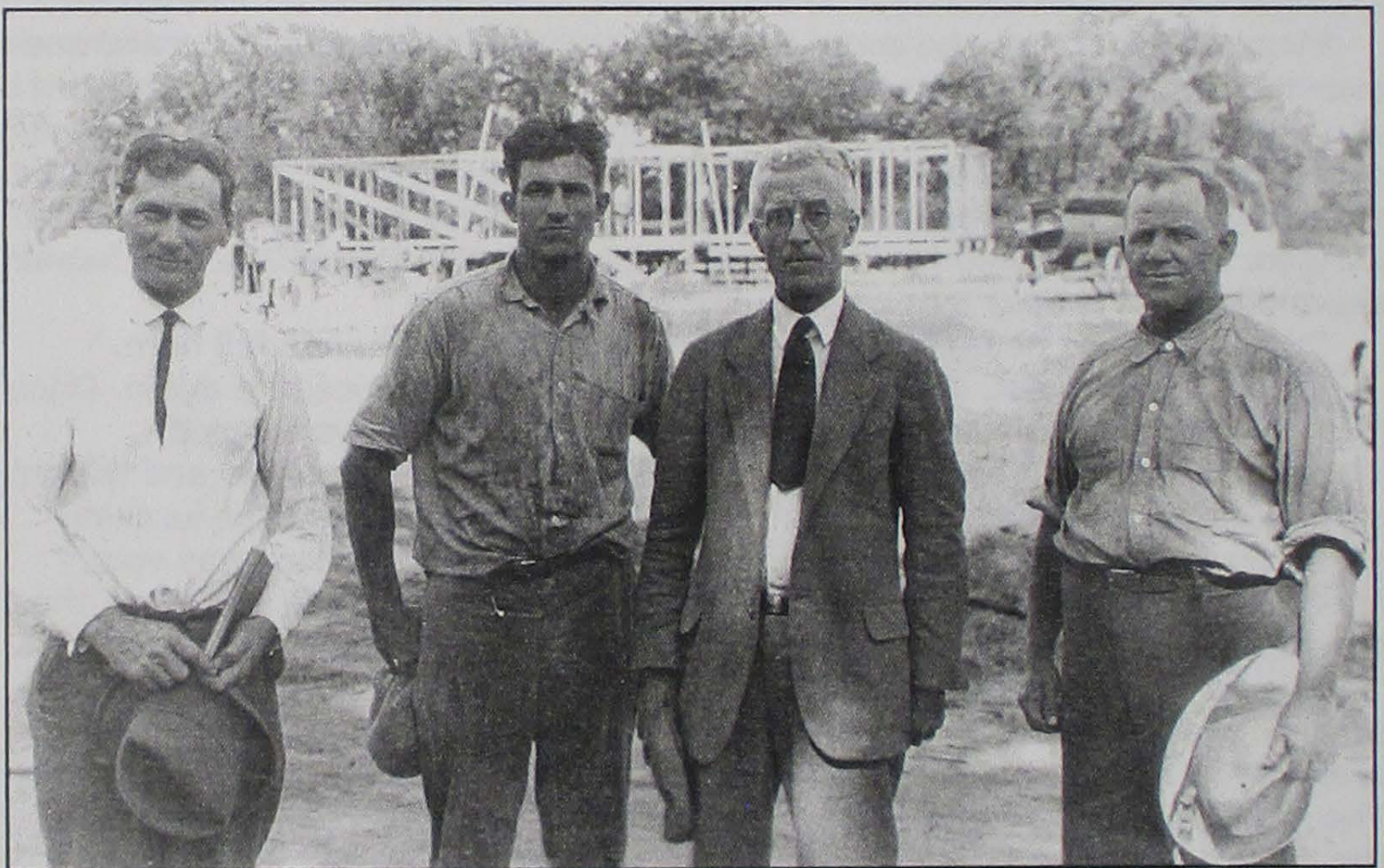
She let up on the foot feed at the corner of Knapp and Hayward. She pressed her left foot down on the clutch pedal. Her right foot pressed the brake pedal. Barely able to see over the hood, she turned the steering wheel. The right front tire bounced up onto the new concrete curb, then down into the gutter. We boys laughed at the great fun. Bruce was no help to Mom. Eventually, we arrived at the appointment destination and even got back home safely. We three boys had been entertained thoroughly. Mom was exasperated. She swore that was the last time she would ever drive a car. To my knowledge, it was.

Mom liked washing clothes in the "brown house" basement with her new Maytag. The rolling white rubber rollers of the wringer mechanism intrigued



me. One morning I watched Mom squeeze wet clothes through the wringer. She stooped to pick up a basket of clothes. I reached up, pressing the fingertips of my left hand into the seam where the rollers turned into each other. My hand was pulled in between the moving rollers. I screamed, pulling my hand back, but could not free it. The moving rollers were peeling skin off my left palm at the forefinger joint. Mom dropped her basket and came running. She grabbed the power cord, pulling it from the wall socket. The washer motor stopped. My hand was locked between the rollers. I was in unbearable pain. Mom turned a small handle and kept unscrewing it. The rollers finally separated enough to free my bleeding hand. Mom carried me upstairs to the bathroom where she cleaned and bandaged my wounds. Scars are still visible.

During the summer of '26 we lived at Carr's Park, a recreational area out past the cornfields, northeast of Ames. A new concrete swimming pool had been constructed. Dad was hired to build a number of concession stands and a sizeable bathhouse. As dad worked on the bathhouse, Mom operated a food concession a few feet from the west edge of the swimming pool.



**George Clark, second from left, constructed the bathhouse, frame of which can be seen in the background.  
"Pop" Carr is at right. (other two men are unknown)**



Bruce was four years old, Paul, two and I was three. Mom's instructions to me called for keeping an eye on Paul. I did, even repeating Mom's warning not to go near the deep end of the pool. After not seeing Paul for a while, I ran to the concession stand and shouted, "Mom, I can't see Paul! I can't see Paul!"



**Bob and Paul (right) Carr's Pool 1926.**  
**Note: Model T in background.**

She ran to the pool, spying Paul under the water at the deep end, lying on the bottom. He had drowned. Mom jumped in, waded to the deep end, reached down and pulled him up. She carried him to the west edge of the pool, pushed him over the concrete edge onto the sand. She pulled herself up and out of the water, laid Paul face down, turning his head to the right.



Mom got down on her knees in the sand, alternately pressing and letting up on his back. Water gurgled from his mouth. Paul lived. Mom's report to Dad credited me with saving Paul's life.

One sunny day, a number of kids about my age appeared at the pool. I spied a cute blond among the others at the north end of the pool. Her bright blue eyes sparkled. Her smile was infectious. She told me how much she enjoyed diving as we stood on the concrete poolside sidewalk. She was anxious to get back into the water. There was a hole in the crotch of her black and yellow horizontally striped bathing suit. I joined her. She told me she had come to the pool from another town. The town had a long name I could not remember. We had the time of our lives talking, splashing in the water and laughing. When it was time for her to leave, I had a strange feeling I couldn't understand. It was as if a huge magnet was pulling at my stomach. I didn't want her to leave and wondered if I would ever see her again. At the bathhouse on the east side of the pool she turned and waved. I waved back from the north end of the pool. My very favorite girl in all the world disappeared into the bathhouse.



I hurried to the concession stand to tell Mom about the striking girl I had met. I couldn't remember the name of the town where she lived. There was always something unfinished about that meeting. A hollow stomach feeling came over me when I thought of the girl years and years later.

In 1927, the radio carried news of Charles Lindberg landing his plane in Paris. Dad always called him "Lucky Lindy," the name of a song played on the radio.

My grandparents drove from their home in Chariton to Ames in their gray-green Chevrolet. Grandpa, Ralph Emerson Dotts, was a portly man, nicknamed "R.E." and Grandma Dotts, a tiny woman, was named Orpha.

I rode in the back seat when they traveled the nearly 100 miles back to Chariton. Their southwest Chariton home faced north. The back of their lot was adjacent to the railroad tracks. Grandpa Dotts was a mail man, working in railroad mail cars. I slept in the back room of their home. I was awakened one night by the opening of the door to my room at the back of the house. Grandpa entered, unstrapped his gun holster and placed it on a chair beside the door. I had never seen a real pistol before. At my age, four, that gun appeared huge.





**Ralph Emerson (R. E.) Dotts, Vera's dad, Bob's grandfather.  
R. E. was a mailman on trains.**



I rode with my grandparents south to Corydon, county seat of Wayne County, 17 miles from Chariton. There, I met my Great-Grandpa Wolf, Grandma Dotts' father.



**Vera's Grandfather Wolf. Bob visited him at the age of 4 in Corydon, Iowa. He was a Civil War Veteran.**



Wolf's home southwest of the town square faced east. My great grand-daddy sat out on the front porch of his house in a rocking chair. I looked at him from the ground at the north end of the porch, watching him rock back and forth. That home is occupied today.



**The old Wolf home, Corydon, Iowa**

Marjorie Ann, blue-eyed blond, was born May 8, 1928. My parents finally received the daughter they had expected me to be. We still lived in the brown house.

Dad worked on the interior of the white two-story house at the corner of Knapp Street and Hayward Avenue, east of my parents' three homes. He built a home, painted white, a block north of Knapp on the north side of Hunt Street for Jack Jenkins, a young man who built radios in his spare time. Dad took a newly built Atwater Kent radio as part of his pay.

My parents became owners of several lots on Hunt and Hayward. Dad built a home east of the Jenkins house on the south side of Hunt Street.

The mud and cinder streets were being paved to contain concrete curbs. While driving the Durant, Dad turned a muddy street corner, sliding into a culvert, badly bending the right front steel disk wheel. He couldn't drive the car. One night Dad dreamed of placing the bent wheel over hot coals in the fireplace of the house he was building. In his dream, the heat straightened the steel disk wheel.

The next morning Dad removed the bent wheel from the car, separated the rim, inner tube and tire from the metal disc wheel and carried the wheel to the new home. He built a fire in the fireplace. When the coals were hot, Dad rested the wheel on the fireplace andirons. The heat, with a little help from gravity, straightened the Durant wheel. A young couple named Lewis and Louise Licken rented that house.



After we moved into the brown house, the little house sat vacant. The area in front of it became what appeared to be a mini-lumberyard as Dad unloaded various building materials from his Model T Ford flatbed truck. A family named Farrow lived next door to the east of the brown house. Mrs. Farrow appeared deeply interested in Dad's activities. Farrow's little white Spitz dog, "Fluffy," barked at nearly every move made by Dad and his fellow workers.

Paul Farrow, a handsome young man about three times my age, had become an idol of mine. He played tennis. I had commenced combing my hair to emulate the swirl of Paul's hair. At the age of 12, Paul's appendix burst. He was rushed to Mary Greeley Hospital in downtown Ames. He died. I was devastated and utterly confused by the news. I simply did not understand death. Mom explained to us three boys that Paul had gone to Heaven, but his body would lie in a casket in Farrow's living room. I didn't understand the meaning of terms such as "body," "casket," nor "the viewing." It was clear Mom wanted me to see Paul one last time. She promised to take me next door to see him the hours of the viewing.

I got cleaned up and combed my hair the way Paul had combed his. Then I waited and waited for Mom to accompany me over to Farrow's. I heard Fluffy barking as people approached the Farrow residence that sunny spring afternoon. Mom was having difficulty getting the younger kids to take naps so she could step out a few minutes. Finally she assured me I would be all right going without her. I walked over alone. Fluffy had been taken inside. I flipped the metal gate latch up and pushed the gate open, hesitating on the front steps. I thought of turning back. But the front door was open, so I entered. The front room, laden with flowers, smelled a lot like Mom's face powder. I had hoped Paul's older sister would be there. Angeline had soft brown eyes and long dark hair like Mom's. She had always been nice to me. I walked to the north end of the large living room unaware I had just passed a large unfamiliar object on my right. No one was in sight, not even Angeline. I wondered if Paul could be in that silver thing, the first casket I had ever seen. I wouldn't get too close. At a distance, I rocked up on my tiptoes, sneaking a glimpse inside. I could barely see Paul. His eyes were closed. I couldn't tell if his hair was combed. I turned away, fixed my eyes on the front door and walked briskly back past the end of the casket and out the door. Death was so strange. I had been so alone there that day.

Dad sold the little house to Bill Kaufman, the painting contractor. He and Dad planned to move it from campus town north and east a couple miles to Ridgewood Avenue, northwest of downtown Ames.

One day I watched Dad load lumber onto his flatbed truck. He got in, set the spark and gas levers on the steering wheel post, turned on the switch, stepped out, went to the front of the truck, leaned down and started cranking the motor. It often kicked, hurting his wrist and arm. The motor started. Back in the truck, Dad pushed his foot down on a foot pedal, one of three protruding through the floorboard. He pushed on the gas lever. The truck



lurched forward. Being overloaded, the front wheels raised off the ground. Dad shut off the switch, jumped down from the raised running board and removed some of the lumber from the truck bed. The front wheels dropped back to the ground. I saw Mrs. Farrow standing on her back step, arms folded, viewing the entire episode and expressing her disapproval by varied facial contortions. Dad knew she was highly conscious of his storing building materials anywhere near her property. He ignored her.

The day arrived for moving the little house. Dad and Bill Kaufman used house jacks to raise the building and then placed wooden blocks under the corners. I stood watching Dad back a truck hitched to a long flatbed trailer to the little house. At the cindered alley, it was very difficult for him to negotiate Farrow's fence corner turn. The right side of the trailer slightly scraped the corner fence post as he backed. Looking out her window, of course, was Mrs. Farrow. The little house extended past the edges of the trailer when loaded. Dad and Bill realized pulling a wider load going out past that tricky corner posed more of a problem than when entered.

"What are we gonna do about that fence corner?" Bill asked Dad.

"She'll just have to move her damned fence," Dad came back. "Let's give it a little thought over a cup of coffee."

The two of them went into the house. Once they had gone, Mrs. Farrow came out of her house, hurried down the back steps and walked along the fence, examining the corner post. I walked over to the fence and stood, hands on hips, looking at her.

"You'll have to move your damned fence," I spouted.

She turned away abruptly, shuffled quickly across her lawn, sped up the back steps and into her house. Soon, Dad and Mr. Kaufman came out, returning to their work.

"I understand," said Dad, standing in front of me looking down, "you told Mrs. Farrow she'd have to move her damned fence."

"Yep," I replied proudly.

He laughed. "Well, I think we can get past her fence all right."

Mrs. Farrow had phoned 1219J, informing Dad, in no uncertain terms, she was not going to move her damned fence.

Dad cranked the truck. In no time, the truck, trailer and little house commenced to move northeast. Dad slowly turned right into the alley. Observing this spectacle from behind the moving trailer, I saw the slight space between the fence and lower edge of the little house continue to narrow. Mrs. Farrow was nowhere to be seen. The moving house glided within inches of her corner post, but completed the turn without touching it. Sadness came over me as the little house, where Bruce and I were born, moved slowly eastward down the cindered alley toward Hayward Avenue. Dad turned left onto Hayward. I watched until the little house was out of sight. It was never coming back.

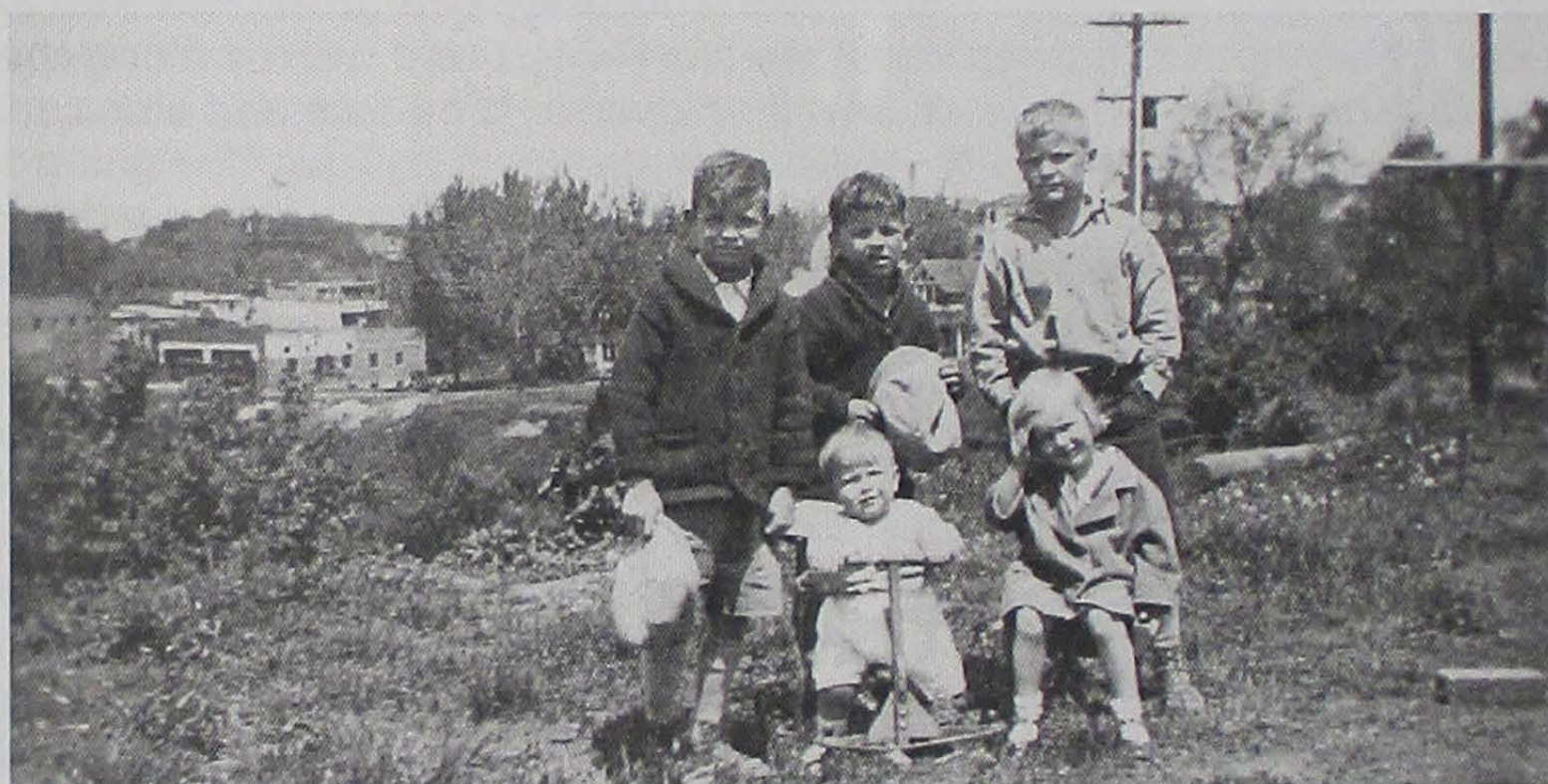
Bill Kaufman used the little house as the center structure for a family home.



I had missed Paul Farrow following his death. After the Farrow's moved away, I missed Angeline. A military couple named Booker moved in next door. Major Booker was an army officer in the R.O.T.C. at the college. Bookers had an attractive daughter. Brown-eyed Emily had long dark hair. She was in my kindergarten class. Her daddy was promoted to Lt. Colonel.

Emily was pretty, but none of the girls I got to know in the neighborhood or at school gave me the thrill and warm feeling I experienced with the girl at the swimming pool. Her sparkling blue eyes and irresistible smile often floated through my mind, bringing a thrilling sensation followed by that old hollow feeling. Would I ever see her again?

Dad owned the lot just west of Jack Jenkins' home. He built a house there. It was on a hill at 2625 Hunt Street. A vacant area to the west sloped downward to Sheldon Avenue. There was a steep downward slope to the north of the newly built house. Its siding was wood roofing shingles just as on the brown house but were painted gray. We moved from the brown house into the gray house. An old black stagecoach stood near the street on the vacant land just west of the house. On its right doorpost was an oval shaped metal emblem bearing the words, "Body by Fisher." Our friends and we three boys played in "our" stagecoach.



**First five Clark kids on Hunt Street hill, 1931. Front, from left: Danny Boy at one year, Marj., three. Back from left: Bob, Paul and Bruce. Iowa State College campus is in the background.**

Dad went to work for \$1 an hour, six days a week for Ben Cole, a highly reputable Ames building contractor. There were no deductions in those days. He got home with a weekly paycheck of \$48.

Nights and Sundays, he built homes. Rent income made the mortgage payments on the properties.



In 1929, Dad rushed Bruce to the hospital with a burst appendix. Unlike Paul Farrow, Bruce lived.

On the west side of the gray house was a cinder driveway. East of it was the sidewalk leading to the south-facing door. Dad dug a driveway leading to a basement garage a few feet to the east of the sidewalk. In the basement, he kept a huge electric motor weighing 500 pounds. It had to be loaded on the back of a truck. Plasterer Hugo Cantonwine, about Dad's age, often worked on Dad's new homes. He was slightly taller than Dad and outweighed him by 20 pounds or more. Hugo and a brother from California often wrestled at various meets in the area. Mr. Cantonwine had helped Dad pull the heavy motor over near the basement garage entrance ready for loading. Dad backed his flatbed truck down the unpaved driveway. The two of them were to lift the heavy motor onto the truck.

"George," said Hugo, "I'll bet you can't lift that motor up on that truck bed."

"Oh," Dad said, "I could lift it up there alright, but with two of us here why should I?"

Pulling a five dollar bill from his pants pocket, Hugo said, "This five dollar bill says you can't!"

I was sure Mr. Cantonwine's implication was he would attempt loading the motor if Dad didn't. Dad squatted and rocked the huge motor back allowing room for slipping his hands under the metal base. The motor rested temporarily against Dad's left shoulder. He inhaled, then exhaled, inhaled slowly, holding his breath and firming his grasp. Dad steeled his muscles, grunting as he slowly lifted. The motor was off the ground. Very slowly Dad's legs commenced to straighten from the crouched position. When the motor's steel platform was finally even with the top of the truck bed, Dad exhaled, took a short step toward the truck bed, inhaled, grunting again, took one more tiny step, leaned into the truck bed, pressing the motor onto its flat surface. Dad abruptly threw his right hand to the back of his neck.

"Well, I'll be damned," Hugo muttered, handing Dad the five dollar bill.

Dad reared his head back in an attempt to relax neck muscles that had locked. He had pulled a set of muscles leaving a permanent lump on the right back of his neck.

Hugo's younger brother, Howard, wrestled professionally. He had taught Hugo a wrestling maneuver they called "the airplane spin." Hugo insisted he demonstrate on Dad. Months after Hugo had lost the motor lifting bet; the two were working in the same basement driveway.

"What do ya do with this airplane spin?" Dad asked.

"I'll show ya!" Hugo said. "I can pin ya in no time usin' the airplane spin."

"I can pin you quicker without it," Dad said, laughing.

"You're on!" Hugo said, leaning down, thrusting his head between Dad's legs. He grasped Dad's legs with both arms, pulling Dad into the air. In a flash Dad was up on Hugo's shoulders. Hugo commenced turning in an attempt to spin. Dad grasped Hugo's neck, rolled off his shoulders, pulling



him down onto the basement driveway. The two struggled against each other for several minutes with first one on top and then the other. Finally, Dad gained the upper hand, spread himself across Hugo's chest, pinning his shoulders to the ground. I never again heard "the airplane spin" enter their conversations.

The snow came. Dad had parked the pale blue Essex in front of the gray house headed west on Hunt Street. Paul and I, bundled up in our winter coats, were to ride to school with Dad. When we started to pull out, the car's wheels spun in the new, deep snow. Dad told Paul and me to get out and push. We got behind the car and pushed, Paul at the right rear bumper and me at the left. Dad pulled the car forward then immediately back. As he rocked the car back Paul and I jumped out of the way. Dad pulled forward again then immediately started back. I jumped back out of the way. Paul slipped on the new snow and fell. Before he could get up, the right rear wheel rolled over him.

"Dad! Dad!" I shouted, running to the left front window.

Dad shifted gears to pull forward again. I knew he was about to run over Paul again, this time going forward. He rolled his window down to hear what I was saying.

"Paul's under the car!"

"What?!" Dad hit the switch. The motor died. He leaped from the car.

"He slipped and . . ." I commenced. I ran behind Dad as he hurried to the back of the car and around to the right back wheel. Paul, crying loudly, had been pressed down into the snow and was lodged beneath the running board. Dad dropped to his knees, pulled Paul free and checked him for broken bones. There were none. I was credited with saving Paul's life once again.

In the fall of 1929, the stock market crashed, throwing the economy into chaos. More and more people found themselves out of work. Dad and his construction friends built a home for a couple named Guttermot on the south side of Hunt Street, across from the gray house.

Their daughter, Margene, was a year or two younger than I. She and I often played on a dirt landing in the side of the hill north of the house. One day while playing on the landing, Margene commenced holding her crotch desperately needing to relieve herself. I called Mom. While waiting for Mom to come down over the hill, I did my part by helping Margene hold herself. Mom finally appeared.

"Margene has to go to the toilet," I explained. "But, she doesn't have a pee-pee."

"She doesn't need one, Hon," Mom informed me. "You can let go now."

I let Mom handle this one. Of course, Mom told that story to Dad and to many of her lady friends. No one bothered explaining to me how Margene could function without a pee-pee.



I had become a favorite of the Guttermotts and was invited to go places with them. Bruce had gained a reputation of being rough and ready. While Guttermott's house was under construction they lived in an apartment above a Main Street business. One day I was left behind and Bruce was asked to go along with Guttermotts to their apartment. I listened as my parents discussed this strange turn of events. The Guttermotts considered a neighbor boy to be a bully. It was my parents' assumption they had taken Bruce along that day to beat up on the kid they didn't like.

When the work was completed on the newly built house it was painted white. The workmen attempted to collect from Mr. Guttermot. He refused to pay. Dad attempted to unite the workers in a single court action for collecting what they had coming. I heard Dad tell Mom, Hugo Cantonwine, the plasterer, refused to join the others in the legal action.

Dad seemed to think Mr. Cantonwine had gotten a little too cozy with Mrs. Guttermot and that the incident may well have been deliberate on the part of the new homeowners to avoid payment.

Economic conditions continued to worsen throughout the country. Dad had managed to obtain three \$20 gold pieces that he proudly showed to Mom and us kids. Shortly afterward, my Uncle Earl telephoned from Chariton. He was coming to visit us at 2625 Hunt Street. Dad feared Earl may be coming to borrow money. He hid the gold pieces and instructed us kids to say nothing about them.

On April 28, 1930, Mom gave birth to a blue-eyed boy with blond hair. Dad usually selected names of the new babies, naming this one Daniel. Mom's maiden name, Dotts, was selected as Dan's middle name.



**Two of ten homes Dad built.  
Water tower stands just east of Sheldon Avenue.**

The homes Dad had built were mortgaged. My parents relied upon monthly rents to make the mortgage payments. Many of the renters were out of work. It became extremely difficult for them to continue paying rent. Dad's work became spasmodic.

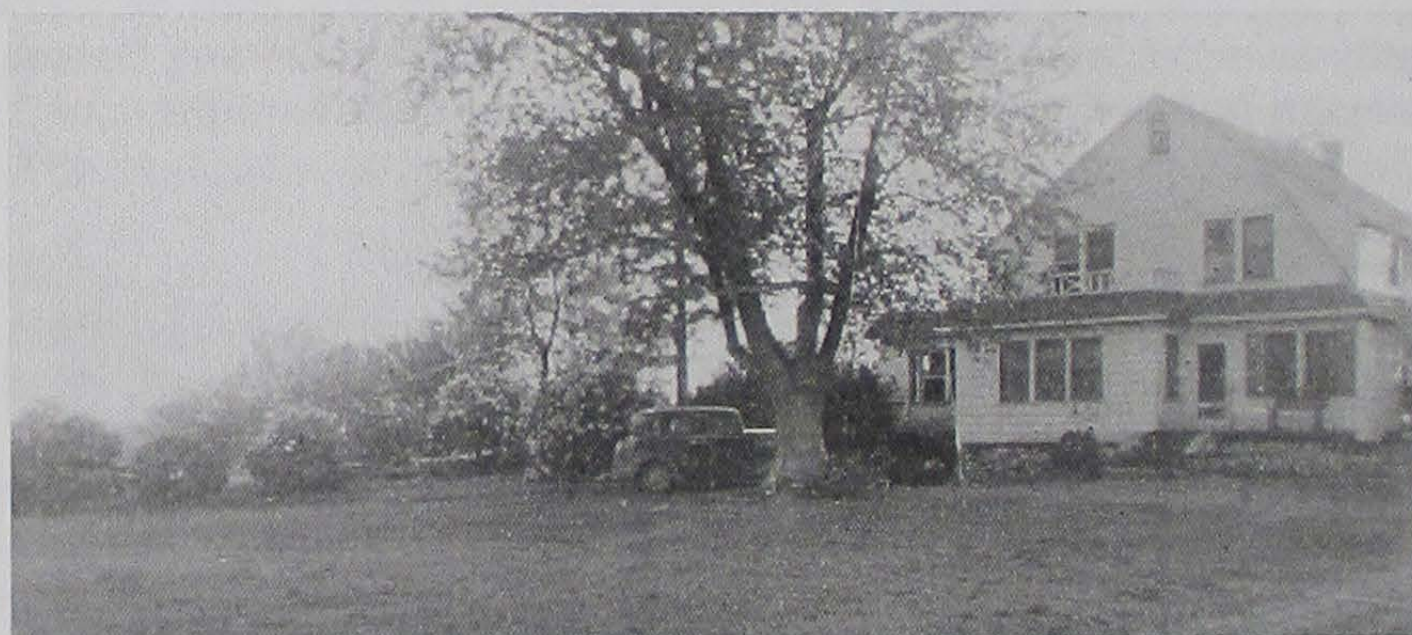


On September 5, 1931, my parents celebrated their 11<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The next day, my second sister, Patricia Louise, a blue-eyed brunette, was born. Her middle name, Louise, was for Louise Licken, a Hunt Street renter. About the same time Mrs. Licken also gave birth to a daughter, Mary Louise. There were now six of us children.

Sundays, the entire family piled into the 1926 light blue Essex for drives through the countryside searching for a small farm where we could raise our own food. Although Ben Cole, the contractor Dad worked for, resided in Ames he owned a farm a mile and a half northeast of Ontario, a tiny town three miles west of the campus on the Chicago Northwestern and Union Pacific railroad. Ben advised Dad a small farm on the road to his farm was for sale.

The family drove out to see it. The 50-acre farm was located about half a mile north of Ontario. About half of the property lay on the west side of a north-south gravel road. The remainder was on the east side of the road. The pale yellow two-story corner house, reconstructed from an old barn, sat on the west side of the gravel road facing east. An east-west dirt road just south of the house dead-ended into the gravel road. The west end of the mile-long dirt road dead-ended into the Boone County line road.

An Ames lady, Carrie Fisher, owned the farm. Following brief negotiations, Dad traded his equity in the campus town rental properties for the farm. He kept two vacant lots on the west side of Hayward Avenue and one on Hunt Street.



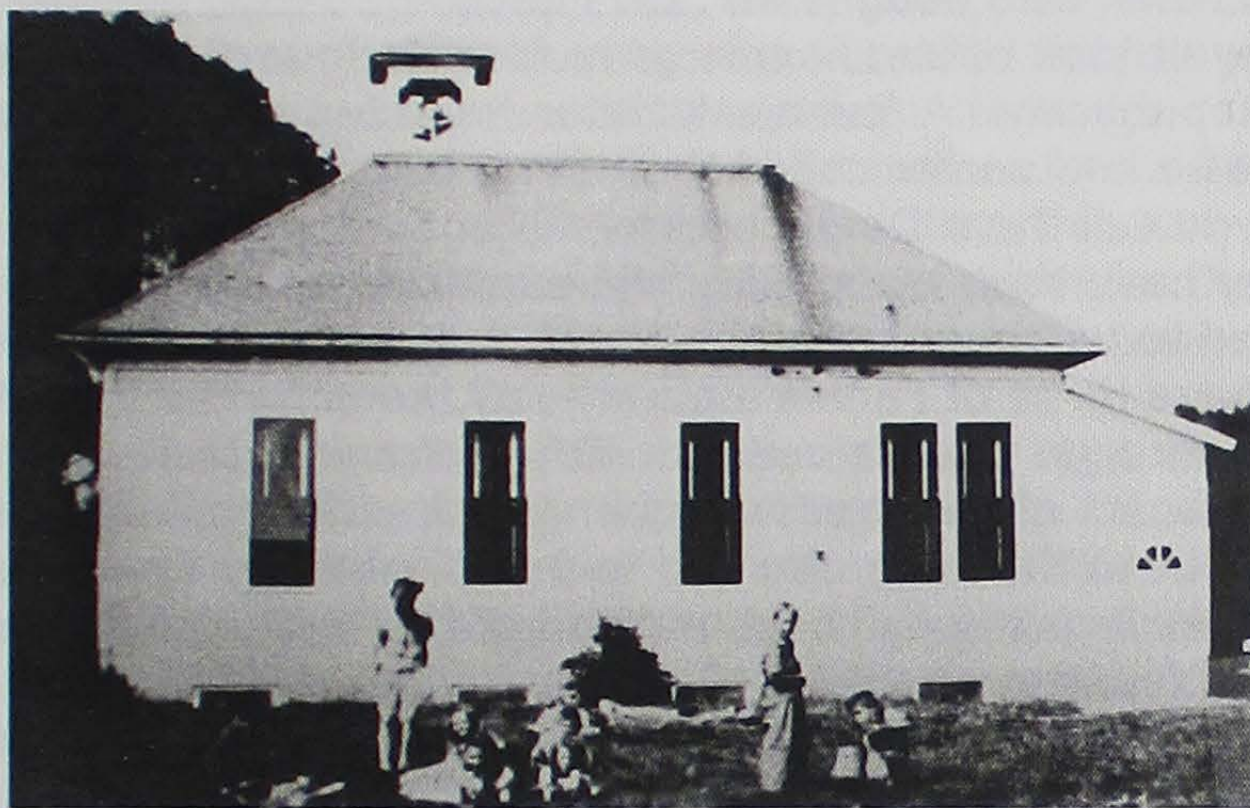
**"Route 3" farmhouse, half a mile north of Ontario,  
home to the Clark family of 14 in the '30s , 40s and 50s.**

In late summer, 1932, our family of eight moved out to the farm. We left paved streets, convenient schools, churches and businesses. We had enjoyed new homes, each with a new dry basement, laundry facilities, running water, electricity, new furnace and cook stove, indoor plumbing and a top notch telephone system.

"I already miss the good phone and our old number, 1219J," Mom said.



Our new telephone number was 22F14. We were on the phone company's 22<sup>nd</sup> line so the number commenced with "22." "F" designated it as a farm line. To know when we were being called we listened for our special signal, one long and four short rings. Therefore, our phone number ended in "14." We had to listen carefully as the phone rang. Most of the rings, of course, were for others on the country phone line. People desiring to know what was going on in the area, or those downright nosey, often lifted the phone receiver from its hook on the left side of the two-foot high wood case, placed a palm over the extended mouthpiece and eavesdropped on the phone conversations of others. Most conversations were very difficult to hear due to low line voltage and static. Two round nine inch tall batteries inside the wood phone case powered the system. Not everyone could afford to replace the batteries as they ran down.



### **Ontario School**

**Of the 24 students enrolled at the one-room school during the '37-'38 term, 1/4 were from the George A. Clark family.**

In September, 1932, Bruce, Paul and I started classes at Ontario School, a white one-room schoolhouse with belfry on top a quarter mile south of our farm on the same side of the gravel road. The schoolhouse sat on five acres and faced east. The rectangular shaped building had a potbelly stove with a coal bucket beside it. There was a coal and cob shed just north of the schoolhouse. About 30 feet west of the building were two outhouses, one for girls, the other for boys. An old rusty pump stood above the well just east of the building. South of the west end of the school was a set of swings on an A-shaped round metal frame. We used kerosene lamps and had no phone.

That fall Iowa native Herbert Hoover ran for a second presidential term. His opponent was New York governor, Franklin D. Roosevelt. On Election Day, we three boys returned from school. Dad was about to leave for town to vote. Mom didn't intend to vote. We were interested to know how Dad



intended to vote in the presidential race. We asked. He said he hadn't quite made up his mind. We urged him to vote for Roosevelt. When he returned we asked how he had voted.

"I thought we should give the Iowa man another chance," he said.

We boys were unhappy. We had no radio. A couple days later at school we learned from other kids Roosevelt had won. FDR, as he was called, would take office on March 4<sup>th</sup> the next year.

On February 10, 1933, two days before my tenth birthday, Mom gave birth to a black haired brown-eyed boy. He was named Philip Arnold and was born at Mary Greeley Hospital in Ames. Caring for Marj, Dan and Pat became my responsibility while Mom was in the hospital. The family had grown to seven youngsters.

Dad saw to it we had a dog. "Fannie," a female Collie, was already bred to a St. Bernard when Dad bought her. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933, the day Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office, Fannie gave birth to four pups in the barn. Dad called them Republicans. A few weeks later he called them Democrats. We reminded him he had earlier called them Republicans.

"Why do you call them Democrats now?"

"Now, they have their eyes open," he explained.

It appeared to us boys that since Election Day Dad's eyes had also been opened. We gave three of Fannie's pups away, keeping the brown male with St. Bernard markings. Dad named him "D" for Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Many vital facets of our lives had changed drastically since moving from campus town out to the farm. We had to pump water by hand and carry it into the house in 3-gallon pails. At one end of the huge kitchen range was a water reservoir for heating about 10 gallons of water. The heated water was dipped out and poured into a pan for washing our faces and hands. A laundry tub sufficed as a bathtub. We always kept a three gallon pail of drinking water on the cabinet top, next to the kitchen sink.

We heated the home and did the cooking largely with wood we cut from our timber. Even on the coldest of days, we used axes, sledges, wedges, crosscut and buck saws to cut and split logs from trees we had cut down. We hauled logs from the timber to the barn with a horse hitched to a huge wooden sled Dad had built. He also built sawbucks to hold the logs for sawing. Many long bitterly cold days were spent cutting and splitting wood.

Since the basement furnace was so inconsistent at providing adequate heat the cook stove was usually relied upon for warmth. On cold winter days, we gathered around the kitchen stove, turning our cold sides away from the north window toward the stove to warm one side at a time.

Steel irons were heated on the kitchen range's metal surface. It contained about a dozen round lids that were removed with a Z-shaped metal handle for stoking and adding wood. Once the lids were in place, cooking utensils were placed on the flat horizontal surface of the stove. Smoke often seeped up through the circular cracks around the lids, leaving soot on the bottom of tea kettles, pans and flat irons.



We started fires in both the kitchen range and basement furnace by crumpling sheets of newspapers, adding kindling wood, then dashing a little kerosene on the paper and wood, striking a wooden stick match and tossing it into the furnace or stove to ignite the kerosene. There were usually piles of corncobs available at no charge about a quarter mile south of our house beside the grain elevator on the north edge of the little town of Ontario. We shoveled them onto the back of the pickup.

Many farmers were burning dried ears of corn. Selling at ten cents a bushel, it actually made cheap fuel.

Dad preferred taking Bruce and Paul on his construction work. I was usually left home to spade, plant and hoe the huge vegetable gardens, one just southwest of the house and one northeast. In 1934, dust storms hit the Midwest. Clouds of dust darkened our skies. High winds sent dust swirling into the air, penetrating my eyes, ears, nose, hair and clothing as I worked the dry dirt. Drought and dust storms subsided in later years, but the endless cropping up of weeds presented a constant challenge.

Former renters Wilbur and Gladys Greer had moved into a house on Oakland Street at the north edge of campus town. Late in 1934, Mom was expecting once more. Greers offered her their guest room for the occasion. She accepted and on December 12<sup>th</sup> gave birth to another bouncing baby boy, brown haired, brown-eyed Douglas Lee.

Late in 1935, Dad commenced remodeling a former Main Street grocery store, turning it into a restaurant for Tom Gettagannis, a long-time friend of Dad who had owned the Candy Kitchen at campus town. The drought of 1934 and '35 had deprived us of the vegetables needed for the winter. Severe snowstorms struck in late 1935. Snowdrifts were above most of the telephone poles. We boys tunneled through the high snowdrifts beside the road most of the way between home and school.

Road graders could move some snow, but were not designed for that purpose. Our country roads remained closed. Dad slept at the store he was remodeling. On the farm we became desperate for food. Telephone wires iced, many snapping from the weight. Dad tried over and over to telephone Mom, but had trouble getting through. He finally made the connection. Others on the rural phone line listened in, sapping line voltage, which made it more difficult for Mom and Dad to hear each other. Mom did get the message through to Dad that we were in desperate need of food. Dad told her he would get groceries and attempt walking out from Ames along the railroad tracks since they were kept open for trains to move. He did, leaving the cleared railroad tracks at Ontario and trudging through the high drifts the half mile on home. He took the same route for his walk back to work.

A thick icy crust formed on top of the high snowdrifts. Neither farm nor wild animals could break through the ice crust to get food. Dad had arranged with his old boss, Ben Cole, for us boys to get some corn fodder stacked in his field. We hitched Bid to the huge wooden sled Dad had built and, taking along a shovel, drove her down the hill to the north, crossing Onion Creek



bridge on the ice crust. Although Bid's hooves often slid in various directions on the ice we managed to round the curve in the road beneath, occasionally spotting the tip of a telephone post as a guide. We located the field, breaking through the ice with the shovel and digging down through the snow. We soon struck corn stalks and commenced loading the sled, tying the bundles of corn stalks down tightly. We started home with the loaded sled. On the west side of a downward slope the sled ran up on Bid's heels. She jumped, slipped and fell through the ice crust into the deep snow, pulling the loaded sled down with her. She panicked and pawed wildly, sinking further into the deep snow. Paul and I leaned over, grabbing Bid's bridle and pulled, trying to remain upright on the slick ice. Bid stomped and pawed, breaking ice ahead of her. We pulled. Our frantic antics continued until the horse and sled were out of the hole and back onto the ice. We slowly made our way home with what was left of the direly needed feed for the sheep and cows.

It was a hot day early in the summer of 1936 when our phone rang one long and four shorts. Mom answered and called Dad to the phone, saying it was Clarence Lindsay, a Mormon bishop from Dingle, Idaho. The bishop and his wife, Mona, were in Ames on their way back to Idaho in a school bus they had purchased in Indiana. Lindsays were neighbors of Dad's sister and family. They offered a ride to any of our family desiring to make the trip to Idaho. Dad thanked him for the offer, telling him no one in the family would be making the trip.

After Dad hung up I told him I would have gladly ridden out with them. We quickly tossed a few items into a suitcase. In a matter of minutes Dad and I were in his car heading for that school bus. Mr. Grinstead, a family friend, operated a filling station on the northeast corner of the intersection where our gravel road crossed Highway 30. We turned west at "Grinstead's corner" onto 30, Lincoln Highway. In no time we overtook the school bus. Bishop Lindsay saw my waving arm out the car window and stopped the bus. Dad pulled off on the shoulder of the highway, grabbed the suitcase and hurried it to the bus, hesitating to speak briefly with Lindsays. I was on a 1200 mile trip west.

I spent the summer with my aunt, uncle and cousins Lois, Norma Jean, Ramona and Lee, a baby boy. Their town, Dingle, was originally named Dingle Dell located north of Bear Lake which lies partially in southeast Idaho and partially in northeast Utah. That summer I worked for, and with, my uncle Mitch. Many days I drove a team of horses to mow and rake alfalfa. On horseback, I helped herd wild horses, cattle and sheep. I watched the cowboys brand the animals. We moved from one branding point to another. My uncle allowed me to drive his Model A Ford through the sagebrush laden hills. One hot day, when riding home from the mountains, realizing the gas supply was nearly gone, Uncle Mitch pulled the car to the side of the road. He got out, reached in the back of the car and picked up a large can. He went up the side of the mountain, beside the road, and filled the can with sulfur water spouting from a spring. Back at the car, he poured the water into the gas



tank. It mixed with the small amount of gas in the tank, giving us the fuel needed to drive home.

In the darkness of the early mornings, Uncle Mitch and I drove to Montpelier, a fair sized town, about 12 miles north of Dingle. We ate at a large restaurant crowded with cowboys. I always ordered hotcakes.

One Saturday, I went with my cousins to see a whale preserved in formaldehyde on display in an open railroad car at Montpelier. The fare was 10 cents. The odor was horrendous. But, I had actually seen a whale.

I was 13 and had never been away from home for such a long period. I suffered my first homesickness, but stuck it out all summer. In late August, I bought a cowboy hat for the trip home and wrote my Omaha relatives I would stop to visit them. I had not mentioned the hat in my letter to them but they knew a kid spending a summer in the west would be wearing a cowboy hat. They had figured correctly. At the busy Omaha railroad station, they found me under the hat and informed me I had a new little sister, born August 22<sup>nd</sup>. There were six boys and three girls in our family.

When I arrived home, Jacqueline, the new baby, was in the hospital. She had suffered stomach difficulties from birth. When she came home, Mom had to feed her Carnation Milk from cans. Soon, Jacqueline was back in Mary Greeley Hospital at Ames. We lost her on October 14<sup>th</sup>.

Mom commented on the beauty of the flowers that had arrived at the house following her death. I replied, "Not nearly as beautiful as that little baby."

Bruce and I dug her tiny grave in Ontario Cemetery, located on the east side of the gravel road, nearly a mile south of our farm. The ground was very hard. We dug through the compacted soil as deeply as we could, but didn't make it to a depth of six feet as intended. Dad eventually arrived, checked our work and said the little grave looked to be deep enough.

The day of the funeral I stayed with the smaller children. The rest of the family left for Adams Funeral Home in Ames. Hugo Cantonwine drove his wife, Fern, out to the farm. She relieved me. I rode with Mr. Cantonwine to the funeral home. I got out of his car at the front gate on Douglas Avenue. He parked the car. I entered through the west door of the funeral home. When inside, a man directed me to the east side of the home, where I saw my family seated in an alcove on the north side of the huge room.

Mom saw me as I entered, recalled my comment about the flowers and burst into tears. I paused at the small white casket on a stand in front of the family. The baby had lost considerable weight. A V-shaped indentation was visible in her forehead. Her eye lids were sealed by a light yellow adhesive, contrasting against the baby's white skin.

After the brief ceremony at the funeral home, Mr. Cantonwine rushed me home to take care of the little kids and drove his wife back to Ames. Dad, Mom, my brothers and sisters arrived home following the graveside service. Mom, devastated by the loss of her baby, went upstairs. Dad then told Bruce to go up and stay with Mom. He didn't want her left alone.



Our radio, powered by a car battery, was located at the northeast corner of an alcove off the dining room. An archway separated the two rooms. The song, "When I Grow Too Old to Dream" was playing on the radio. I stood in the dining room alone, listening, personally dedicating that song to our tiny sister in Heaven. I often sang along as I listened to music. From that day, when I heard the song, I remained silent in memory of Jacqueline.

"When I grow too old to dream, I'll have you to remember."

The three of us boys took turns at the well, pumping water by raising and pressing down on the steel pump handle by hand, filling 3-gallon metal buckets and carrying them from the well about 50 yards into the house. When the well was dry, we walked about half mile through the pasture and down a hill to an artesian well – a rusty steel pipe driven into the side of a hill – fill the pails and carry them back up the hill and across the pasture to the house. That cold clear artesian well water still ranks as the best I ever drank.

There was one other source of water when our well was dry in the heat of summer – the pump just north of the Ontario railroad station.

One hot summer day Paul, Dan and I haltered and harnessed our bull, hitching him to an old wooden cart containing a large metal animal watering tank. Paul had a way with the bull. He had haltered and walked him around the barnyard at times. With the family desperately in need of water, the three of us set out for water from the railroad station pump. Paul had never before led the bull that far. We had no idea if this experiment would work. Paul tugged on the halter until the bull moved forward. The cart followed. Dan rode on the cart to keep the metal bucket from clanging against the metal tank and frightening the bull. I walked behind the cart, watching so the huge water tank didn't slide off the flatbed cart. Paul led the bull south, along the hot, dusty, gravel road leading to Ontario. It was a very slow cumbersome process. Paul finally coaxed the bull down the road a full quarter mile and across the railroad tracks to the pump, just north of Ontario's railroad depot. Paul halted the bull and stood holding his halter.

I placed the pail handle over the rusty, round, steel waterspout of the pump, then pumped until the water came pouring out of the spout. I pumped until the bucket was full, then carried the bucket to the cart and poured the water into the tank. Danny Boy, as Marj had tagged Dan, then pumped a bucket full. When the tank was finally filled, Paul tugged on the halter. The bull followed his lead, pulling the cart and filled tank onto the road. At the railroad tracks, the cartwheels struck the first rail with a jolt. Water splashed wildly. There were three more rails to cross. The wheels struck the second rail. Cold water splashed the bull. He pulled away from Paul, jumping his traces and nearly upsetting the cart as he pulled it sideways across the remaining tracks. The harness tugs snapped. The bull trotted home.

Paul, Dan and I pulled the cart home by hand. Very little of the precious water remained in the tank. The bull with half the harness dangling from him, stood at the haystack west of the barn.



Grandma Clark, Dad's mother, lived in Des Moines. She was a large, brown-eyed lady with streaks of white in her black hair. She visited us on the farm. We boys decided to pull a practical joke on her. One of us offered her a chair. As she started to take a seat, we pulled the chair out from under her. Grandma landed on the floor with a thud, injuring her tail bone. My mother scolded us for pulling the trick, but didn't tell Dad. Over the years, Grandma let us know the injury continued to be painful.

Grandma Clark helped Mom with the sewing. She wore a thimble on her right, middle finger. When we kids cut up, she placed her right hand on our heads and thumped quickly with that thimble, resulting in a sharp pain to the ole noggin.

Dad bought a western quarter horse. The tall dark colored mare reminded him of a horse named Bid, he had owned as a boy in Missouri. The new Bid was unbroken.

Dad gave Bruce, Paul and me a cow each – a cow to care for in every way, including milking. Bruce's cow was a black and white Holstein named Daisy. Paul's was a dark brown Jersey named Lily. Mine was a tan and white Guernsey named Pansy. We shoveled manure from behind them and fed them grain and hay. After milking, we herded them to the pasture, where they nibbled grass and drank from a creek.

One Sunday morning, as I was finishing milking, Dad entered the barn through the front door. He turned to his right and walked to the manger where Bid was feeding. I released the three cows from their stanchions and herded them out the back door to the lot behind the barn. I closed the barn door and locked it.

"Not used to havin' somebody on 'er back," said Dad. "Hoist your right foot." I stepped forward to Bid's right. Dad moved in behind me, squatted and cupped his clasped hands under my shoe as I raised my right foot behind me. He boosted me. I swung my left leg over Bid's back, fully realizing she may commence bucking and slamming me into the thick hewn wood timbers above. Dad hurried back around in front of the manger, holding Bid's halter. She stamped around nervously, but didn't buck. I remained on her back for several minutes, the first step in preparing her for riding.

For a long time Bid avoided our mounting her. We persisted. Once on her back, she may toss us off. Once mounted and quieted, however, she loved to get out and run. The dirt mile-long road that ran just to the south of the house on west to the Boone County line proved a great racing strip. Kids we knew rode horses to our house for racing against Bid. She had earned a winning reputation.

One day our neighbor on the farm adjacent to the north of our place, Kenny Mott, a black haired, brown eyed wiry boy Paul's age, rode up our driveway on a black horse with a dash of white between her eyes. Several of us kids hurried outside to see the sleek black mare. She was slightly shorter and chunkier than Bid. Kenny informed us she was a thoroughbred. I thought he meant she was a racehorse and not a work horse.



I went to the barnyard, bridled Bid, reached a handful of her black mane, and hurled myself up onto her back. She proudly trotted up the slight grade to the driveway forming a "U" in front of the house. As my younger brothers and sisters, plus their little friends, followed, Kenny and I rode the two mares down the driveway leading to the dirt road. The kids milled around the two horses. Kenny said he had this one opportunity to pit the mare against Bid. She was only temporarily stabled at his family's farm. We maneuvered the horses to a starting position. When they appeared to be even, Kenny leaned forward and shouted, "Go!"

I dug my heels into Bid's ribs, leaned forward and flipped her reins. The two black mares lunged forward, kicking up a cloud of dust as they galloped side-by-side. Leaning forward, I relaxed the reins, giving Bid her head. We remained dead even. The horses' hooves pounded the dirt. Dust billowed. Bid failed to pull ahead. Again I urged her on with a few brisk slaps of the reins on her left shoulder, digging my heels into her ribs. No matter how I urged her, Bid couldn't gain on Kenny's mare. I knew from experience she had been straining at her top speed. Kenny's continuous flipping of the reins was paying off for him. His mare pulled ahead just slightly. I dug my heels in and flipped the reins, loudly whispering, "C'mon, Bid!" We rode to the end of the mile-long stretch with his mare pulling away. I congratulated Kenny on his victory. For the first time, Bid had lost a race, but a close one.

We allowed the puffing mares to cool down slowly as we trotted them back down the dirt road toward home, verbally recapping the race from each guy's standpoint. At the end of the road I reported the disappointing news to the waiting gang of kids.

Breaking Bid to work was an entirely different story. She detested being hitched to anything, stepping out of her harness traces constantly to avoid pulling a load.

One day, Dad harnessed Bid and led her to the front yard near a long tree trunk he intended her to pull to the sawbuck near the barn. He had tied a log chain around the tree and connected it to a singletree. Bid commenced to disobey Dad, stepping out of her traces. He unhooked the chain linking the left leather tug to the singletree. He pulled it around outside her left hind leg and hooked it once again to the singletree. He started over. Bid continued to defy Dad's commands. Her stubbornness finally exhausted his patience. There was a 2" x 4" about four feet long lying on the ground near the tree trunk. Grasping the reins in his left hand, Dad picked up the 2" x 4" and let her see what he held in his right hand. He repeated his firm command.

"Get up! Get up, Bid! Get up!"

Dad flipped the leather reins, slapping her rump. She lunged forward then back and out of the traces once more. He dropped the reins, raised the club and brought it down over Bid's head. She let out a shrieking whinny and reared. Just as her front hooves came down, Dad caught her over the left eye with the 2" x 4." She jerked back, stunned by the blow. Dad struck her repeatedly over the head. She was dazed but she did not drop. Bid couldn't



recover her senses sufficiently to follow his commands. Dad finally gave up, ordering Paul to return her to the barn and remove her harness. He instructed the rest of us to drag the long tree trunk down to the barn.

Dad drove to Monmouth, Illinois, in his red 1937 Chevy pickup and brought his dad back for a visit. Our Grandpa, Alfred Clark, stood about 5 feet, 10 inches and weighed about 160 pounds. He had gray hair and pale blue eyes. He was a quiet person who enjoyed sitting on the wooden seat Dad had built for our front porch.



**Alf Clark, George's dad.**

Dad had worked alongside "Alf" in the mines as Granddad had with his father at Little Dean, Gloucestershire, England. Alf had suffered mentally from a coalmine explosion at Hiteman, a tiny town in southern Iowa. Alf



divorced Eva, our grandmother, in the '20s and married a Monmouth, Illinois lady.

After a visit of only a few days, Dad drove Granddad home. On July 26, 1940, Grandpa Clark passed away from acute asthma. Dad attended his funeral in Monmouth.

Less than three weeks after Granddad Clark died, Grandma Clark died of cancer. We older boys and Marj drove with our parents to the funeral at Chariton.

Dad taught all his boys to handle guns and hunt. We shot pheasants, geese, ducks, quail, squirrels and rabbits. We cleaned the birds and animals. Mom cooked them, turning out the world's finest meals.

Dad was an expert shot. One Saturday morning, he, Bruce and I rode out on a hunting venture with a few of Dad's friends. Among them was Don Whattoff, who drove that day. Don's family operated the filling station at the corner of Hayward Avenue and Lincoln Way in Campus Town. I rode in the front seat between Don and Dad. Having located the area where we were to hunt, Don pulled the car to the side of the road. Dad stepped out the right front door onto the shoulder, beside a ditch and loaded his 12 gauge shot gun. The noise of the clicking gun frightened two pheasants hiding in the ditch. One flew south, over the field beyond the ditch. The other flew north, across the road, in front of the car. Dad took aim at the pheasant flying south and brought it down. He whirled, aimed at the one flying north and brought it down. No one else had had time to get out of the car. Don Whattoff was still telling that story around Ames a half century later.

One of the many gun demonstrations Dad performed before visitors to the farm, involved an egg, a tiny mirror and his .22 rifle. Oh yes, and me. He always called on me for this performance. I took the egg and stood about 20 yards from Dad. He turned his back to me and placed the rifle upside down, on his right shoulder. I extended my right arm, with the egg between the thumb and forefinger. He aimed by looking into the small mirror held in his left hand. I attempted to hold the egg steady. He fired and always hit the egg. Never a finger.

Dad hunted elk and deer in Idaho, providing the family considerable venison.

While hunting in the timber, we often spied bee swarms in decayed areas of trees. Dad would go to the trees, locate the queen bee, place her in a hive he had built and the swarm followed. He always maintained a couple dozen hives of bees, just south of the house, near a tall evergreen tree.

One sunny spring day, one of the kids noticed bees swarming high in the Elm tree that stood just southwest of our house. They were landing in a cluster on a branch. Bruce, Paul, Dan and I followed Dad to the tree. He looked at the cluster of bees and realized they would soon follow the queen bee to a permanent home, most likely to a rotted out tree in the distant timber. He had to act fast or the swarm would be gone.



Dad sent Dan for an empty wood hive and Paul back into the house to ask Mom for a white sheet. He dispatched Bruce into the house for the 410 shot gun and me to his toolbox in the back of the pickup parked in the driveway for a chalk line and plumb bob. Dad waited at the tree in case the bees commenced to leave. We boys quickly returned. The bees were still there.

Dan and Paul spread the sheet on the ground. Dad placed the wood hive on the sheet, adjusting its position to set directly below the swarm and tied the plumb bob tightly to one end of the long chalk line. He threw it high, looping the chalk line over the limb, just above the swarm of bees. The weight of the plumb bob brought the line, looped over the upper limb, back down. He caught the descending plumb bob and tossed it up and over the limb holding the bees. The line came down the other side of the loaded limb. He removed the plumb bob and slackened the chalk line, giving him enough line to tie a slipknot at the end of it. He then tightened the noose around the lower limb, loaded with bees. He pulled the chalk line riding over the upper limb taught.

"Here," Dad said, handing me the chalk line. "Hold that tight and don't let go!"

Dad motioned for Bruce to hand him the shotgun. He aimed upward and fired, severing the limb containing the swarm a foot out from the slipknot. The sudden jolt from the weight of the limb and bees dangling at the other end of the line nearly pulled it from my grasp. Dad handed the gun to Bruce, relieved me of the chalk line and slowly lowered the swarm of bees into the beehive. He sifted through the bees, locating the queen. He placed her in the hive. The other bees quickly assembled inside the hive with the queen.

Although Bruce and Paul were Dad's preferences to help on his jobs, I joined them at times. Dad promised Paul and me, if we worked for him the summer of 1940, he would buy us a car to drive to and from school that fall. Since we were working toward that car, it was never easy getting spending money from Dad. By the Fourth of July, I had managed to save a little.

Bob Clouser, 16, was a chunky young man who stood about 5' 8" and weighed around 160. He had black hair and blue eyes and lived on a farm a mile north of us. He owned a black, 1933 Ford Roadster with a V-8 motor.

**Evelyn Clouser,  
Bob's younger sister,  
at the Clouser farm, 1943**







**From left: Danny Clark, Howard Grider, Kenny Lint, Bob Clouser and Paul Clark at the Clouser farm, June 20, 1943, prior to Howard, Kenny and Paul entering the service during WW II.**

Bob's nephew, George Grider, was my age, 17. He stood right at 5' 7," with dark brown hair and blue eyes and lived on the north side of Ames. He and I were to commence our senior year in high school at Ames that fall. George's cousin, Betty Bigger, was about our age and lived in Rockwell City, 75 miles northwest of Ames. She and George corresponded. He had often spoken of her, saying she and I had similar perky personalities. He wanted us to meet, so Betty was to be my date that Fourth of July. She arranged blind dates for Bob and George with her girlfriends.

For some reason I was usually called on to drive. It was a sunny day with fleecy white clouds drifting along against a clear blue sky. Bob Clouser drove his '33 Ford Roadster into our driveway. I wasted no time getting in, aware Dad could well come up with a surprise work assignment. Bob drove to George's house at 1429 Burnett Avenue. I drove from George's to Rockwell City on that holiday. The three of us were in the front seat since the only other seat was the rumble seat. We talked and laughed all the way.

Not knowing the town, I drove until I came to a hotel, parking the Ford off the street beneath a hotel balcony. With time on our hands before meeting the girls, we strolled through Rockwell City's business district, looking in one store window after another. Occasionally, we saw a sign advertising the Chamber of Commerce baseball game featuring Babe Ruth as pitcher, taking place that afternoon.

When it got near time to start over to Betty's house, we walked back to the car. I got in behind the steering wheel. George sat beside me with Bob

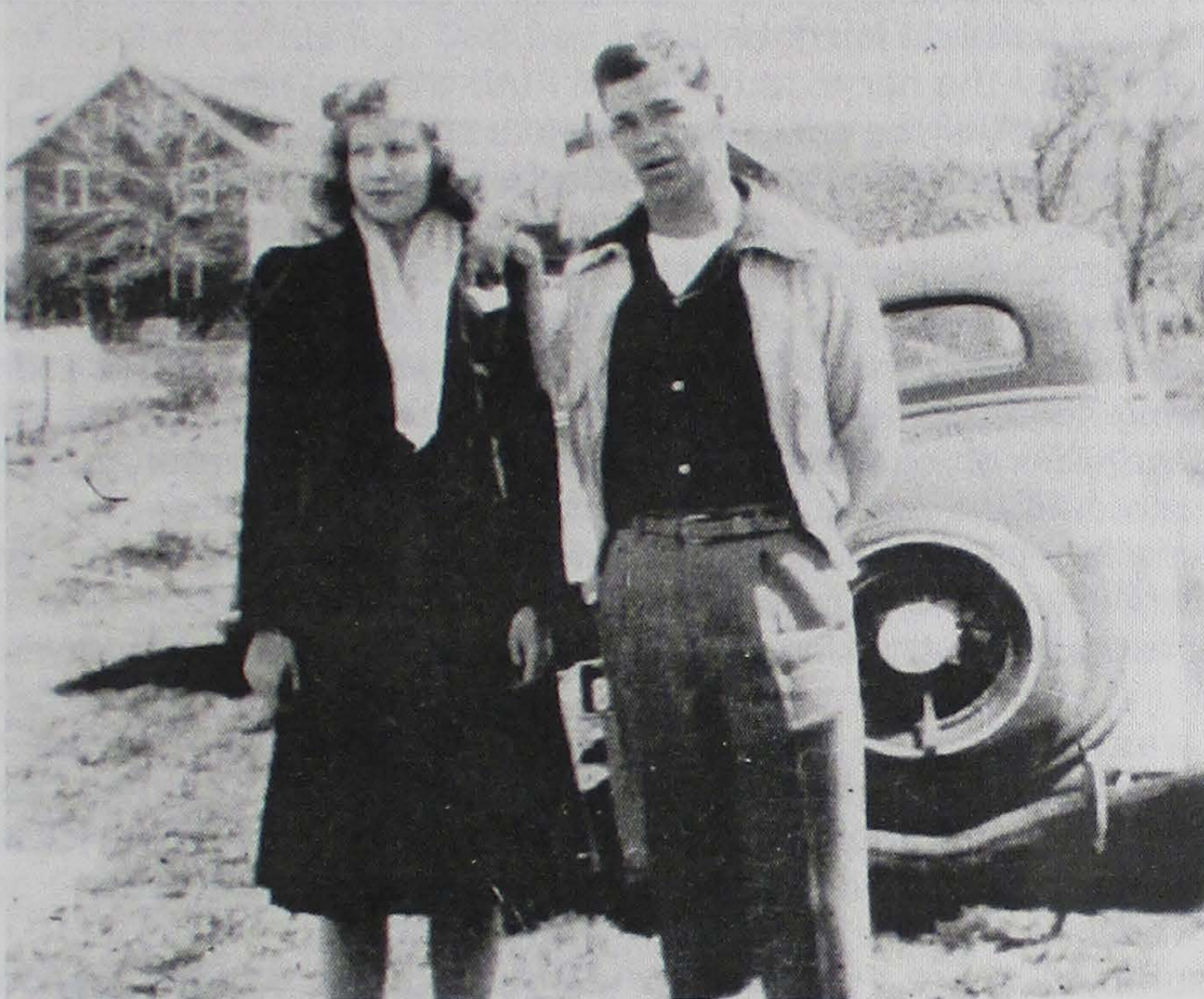


on the right side. I reached the ignition key and turned it to the "on" position, then stepped on the starter. It did not respond. I tried it again. Nothing. Bob got out the right side of the car and pulled up the hood, flipping the radiator cap off. It rolled down the left fender with a loud clatter.

"Sounds like that thing's fallin' apart!" called a male voice from the hotel balcony above.

The three of us glanced up at the large chunky man looking down from the balcony. George got out and picked up the radiator cap, then helped Bob locate the short on the right side.

"All ya hafta do is choke it," came the sage advice from the balcony.



**Iona and Bob in Speck's driveway, Ontario, 1941.  
Bob Clouser's '33 Ford roadster is in the background.**

"Try it now," Bob called to me.

I tried the starter, but to no avail.

"All ya hafta do is choke it!" shouted the big man on the balcony.

George moved a wire and called, "Try it now."

I pressed my right foot on the round silver starter button on the floor, but nothing happened. I stepped out of the car.

"All ya hafta do is choke it!" the man yelled down.

"If you think you can start it, come on down and try it!" I shouted back.

"Bob, if you'll close your side, I'll check over here."



Bob pulled his side of the hood down. I pulled up the left side, folding it to rest. I looked and looked for a spark indicating an electrical short. I moved wires and cables I thought may be the cause. The big man had arrived at the car.

"All ya hafta do is choke it," he said, pressing his hulky body in behind the steering wheel.

I ignored him, reaching a cable riding against the generator, sparking as I touched it. I quickly pulled it away from the generator. The sparking stopped.

"I got it!" I called to Bob and George. "A cable shortin' on the generator."

The stranger behind the wheel had turned the ignition key and pulled the choke rod. He pressed his foot on the starter button. The motor started.

"See? All ya hafta do is choke it!"

None of us had the nerve to tell Babe Ruth the real reason for the motor starting. He got out of the car, standing at the driver's side.

"We saw the signs in the store windows that you'd be here today," I said to the Babe.

Bob and George joined Babe and I at the left side of the car. George asked him how he could pitch without offending the opposing team. Babe explained he would pitch a half game for one team and the other half for the other, ending his reply in an invitation for us to come to the game. We explained we were on our way to meet our young ladies, assuring him that if the girls wanted to go to the baseball game we'd see him there.

The girls, however, had already decided how our day was to be spent. We went to Twin Lakes, a tiny nearby town at the head of two long lakes. We guys took turns driving, giving each time in the rumble seat alone with his girl.

Betty was an attractive brown-eyed brunette with a sharp sense of humor. We joked and laughed until our turn to occupy the rumble seat. Once alone together in the rumble seat, we were locked in long sensual kisses between exchanges of clever remarks. It was late that night when I again took the wheel for the trip home.

That summer, Bruce, Paul and I continued working on Dad's construction jobs. One day in August, Bruce confided in Paul and me that he and Angelo Frangos, of the Ames restaurant family, intended to hitchhike to Chicago to see the all-star football game at Soldier's Field. He knew Dad would not approve. Paul and I swore to keep his secret.

Dad and Bruce had just completed building a corncrib on a farm northeast of Ames. Paul and I were assigned the job of painting it. While most corncribs were red or white, this one would be gray. Bruce had quietly headed for Chicago with Angelo.

Paul left work late each afternoon to deliver the *Des Moines Register*. Before leaving home the morning of the day Bruce was missing, Paul loaded his bicycle onto the bed of Dad's 1937 red Chevy pickup. Dad drove us to the farm where we were to commence painting, questioning us as to where Bruce had gone. We denied any knowledge.



Paul and I painted most of the day. Late in the afternoon, he rode his bike to his delivery route. A song kept running through my mind. As I painted, I sang to myself the few words I knew of the popular song, "I'll Never Smile Again." The new recording by Frank Sinatra, The Pied Pipers and Tommy Dorsey's orchestra was heard on both radio and juke boxes.

The sun commenced to set. I knew something highly unusual must have delayed Dad. I stopped working for the day and sat waiting on a scaffolding plank.

It was nearly dark when Dad arrived. He told me the sad news as we drove. While delivering newspapers on his bike, Paul had been struck by a car just west of the campus on the Highland Avenue hill. He had suffered a compound fracture of his leg. Dad had left him at the hospital to come for me.

Dad further explained that the medical procedure Paul had undergone at the hospital called for a sodium pentothal injection. Taking advantage of the "truth serum," Dad had asked him where Bruce went. Paul blurted out, "He and Angelo went to the All-Star game." I sat quietly, never admitting knowledge of Bruce's venture.

Bob Clouser had started dating Lorraine Speck, a girl my age, who lived in the tiny town of Ontario. Her dad had been our iceman when we lived in town. Lorraine, a well-developed, brown haired young lady with green eyes, stood about my height. One of the main reasons I liked Lorraine was for her plainspoken honesty, informing me on one occasion, she didn't care for my ventriloquist act. I thanked her for being blunt and told her how tired I had become of people insisting I "throw my voice" for them. I was pleased to know she was not one of them.



### **Bob Clouser and Lorraine Speck**

Dad's work slacked. I got a temporary job detasseling corn. The days were long and hot. Continuously reaching the corn tassels was arm-tiring work. At the end of each day, my muscles ached and I was exhausted.

Bob Clouser stopped by our house to inform me Lorraine's friend, Iona Robertson, was no longer dating Oley Erickson, center on the Ames High football team. He, Lorraine and I were to commence our senior year that fall. When we found the time, Oley who lived in Ames, had walked to Ontario school to guide me in physical preparation. That fall would be my last



opportunity to go out for high school football. Always before, I had been busy with farm chores and entertainment appointments.

Bob explained Lorraine could arrange a date between Iona and me. I told him I would go only if the relationship between Iona and Oley had definitely ended. He was sure that was the case. I agreed to the date with Iona.

The evening of the double date, I came in from a long day working in the field. My muscles ached. I hurried to get ready, pressing my own pants.

Iona and her parents lived on Ontario Road, one of the routes we traveled going to and coming from Ames. Iona was 15 and would be in her junior year when school started. She stood a couple inches shorter than me, had bright blue eyes and long honey colored hair. Her seductive voice was soft and rather high pitched. The exquisite body attracted boys and men alike.



That evening, Bob, Lorraine and Iona pulled up in front of our house in the black '33 Ford Roadster. Bob and Lorraine got out and climbed into the rumble seat, leaving the driver's seat open for me. I said, "Hi" to the gang, got in behind the wheel and started driving down our driveway.

Iona wore a light yellow dress that emphasized her figure. She scooted over on the seat to press against me. I felt the soft fingers of her left hand brushing my right thigh as she spread her skirt over my freshly pressed pants. I wondered if she had thrilled Oley and others in that way.

It had been decided we would go to Riverview Amusement Park in Des Moines. I drove south. The heat of the day was still with us. I set window wings to get the maximum breeze through the car.

"Have you had a busy summer, Bobbie?" Iona purred, smoothing the skirt over my right knee. Her voice was soothing. I had always resented being referred to as "Bobbie," considering it a baby version of the name. Hearing Iona purr it was entirely different.

"Oh, sure," I said, avoiding showing excitement. "How 'bout you?"

"I've done some baby sitting. It won't be long 'til school starts."

"No. Not long. Paul and I'll have a car."

"A car of your own?"

"Yep. We've been workin' most of the summer for Dad. He promised us if we'd work for him this summer, he'd buy us a car to drive to school."

"Will you have room for a rider or two?"

"Sure."

"Lorraine and I haven't lined up a ride yet."

"Well, you can ride with us. We'll have room."

Iona placed her right hand on my upper arm, indicating we had a deal. At Riverview, we rented a boat and rowed the girls out on the lake. The sun was



setting. The heat of the day had diminished. Tall trees cast long shadows across the lake. From the dance hall ashore, an orchestra's musical strains floated out over the water. The band played popular music that duplicated nationally famous orchestras. Late that evening, the Artie Shaw version of "Begin the Beguine" echoed across the lake. As the male vocalist sang the lyrics, this line struck me, "Down by the shore an orchestra's playing."

The four of us spent an enjoyable night, ending up at Iona's home. Bob escorted the girls in the rear door. I parked the car on the road, away from the house, depriving any nosey neighbors from knowing we were at the Robertson residence. We had the house to ourselves. Iona's dad worked nights at the college heating plant. Her mother had gone on vacation. Before dawn, Bob and I climbed out the west window, away from prying eyes and drove home.

I was soon back in the cornfield detasseling corn and fighting the heat, humidity and strained muscles. At the end of the day, when good sense called for resting, I was getting ready to go out again. At dusk, Bob Clouser drove his roadster into our driveway. I raced out, jumped in and we were off on another night of romance. We stopped at Speck's and picked up Lorraine. Bob and Lorraine got into the rumble seat. I drove east, down dusty Ontario Road, to Iona's. She was at the door as we drove into the driveway at the back of the house, leaving quietly to avoid her father.

The four of us attended a movie at the Collegian Theater in downtown Ames, stopping afterward at the "Maid-Rite" restaurant on the east end of Main Street for a snack, then drove back to Iona's. Along about daylight, Bob and I climbed out the window, hurried to the car and drove home.

A few evenings later, the four of us were leaving the theater when Oley Erickson suddenly appeared. He approached Iona, explaining that he would like to speak to her alone. Bob, Lorraine and I waited as the two talked privately. After the secret discussion ended I asked Iona what Oley wanted. She admitted never having made it clear to him that they were no longer going steady. He was quite upset at the way she had handled the situation. I felt I had been deceived as well.

At home the family listened to radio broadcasts over speakers wired to a crystal set I had made. It required neither a battery nor electricity to operate. When testing various crystals, I borrowed a piece of iron ore Bruce had brought back from a trip he and Grandpa Dotts had made to Colorado. It drew a wide range of radio stations. Coming in loudest was WOI, the campus station. Its new antenna tower was located in the middle of a cornfield, about a mile away. Since it was a daylight radio station, I simply left the cat whisker on the crystal overnight. The station signed off the air in the evening and came on again each morning.

European war news that year had been disheartening. Germany's armies had completed a sweep through Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Popular big band music featured war songs. "The White Cliffs of Dover" was heard often the summer of 1940.



The entire family was awakened by the crystal set about 3:00 a.m. one morning to Judy Garland's "Over the Rainbow." The WOI broadcast engineer had chosen to test the station's facilities at that hour.

School started. Dad bought us a car, a 1931 gray-green Chevy 4-door. Lorraine, Iona and Kenny Lint, an Ontario friend, rode to school and back with Paul and me. Each of them paid 25 cents a week for transportation.

Paul drove our passengers home the evenings I had football practice. I had gone out for quarterback, but didn't know the plays and had no experience at the position. My only advisor, Oley Erickson, was no longer friendly. The coach stuck with those who had experience. I was issued a football uniform with orange and black jersey number 43. I had my picture taken with the team and was allowed to take part in scrimmages on the practice field, but never played in a game.

I drove the gang home the evenings Paul had football practice. Very rarely, Dad gave me permission to use the car for dating. I coined the pet name "Fayona" for Iona, a combination of her first and middle names. Of all the fine popular music of the day, she and I especially liked "Blueberry Hill" by Glen Miller.

The day of the grudge game against Boone had arrived. The Ames-Boone football game was always played on Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>. We got out of school at noon to attend the afternoon game at Boone. I drove out of the school parking lot with Paul and our three passengers in the cloudy, damp weather. A mist was falling and soon turned to freezing rain. By the time we approached Campus Town, the highway was covered with ice. Passing the Varsity Theater on Lincoln Way, the car just ahead of me skidded to a stop. I hit the brakes and skidded into the rear of the stopped car. I got out, exchanged information with the driver, then drove the gang on home.

Before Paul and I got home, Dad had received a phone call from the driver whose car I had struck. He immediately asked me for the car keys. Paul and I lost the car we had earned. I phoned Iona, Lorraine and Kenny, informing each to find another ride to school.

From that day, Paul and I rode to school with Dad and Bruce as they drove to work. After school, Paul and I walked to the corner of Lincoln Way and Grand Avenue, the hitchhiking corner, and joined other high school and college students hitching rides. Most drivers took us as far as Campus Town, leaving us to walk the remaining three miles of gravel road home where we commenced evening chores.

I was happy to see the long winter end. Work was hard to find. I needed money for senior pictures and a suit for graduation. A few people called for ventriloquist performances. I charged \$3 per performance, plus transportation expenses. I could not afford to let that money slip away.

We got a little time off school around Thanksgiving. A farmer several miles north needed help making molasses. I spent those few school vacation days stirring the dark brown, boiling sugar cane juice with a large boat oar. I ate and slept at the family's home and saved the few coins I earned.



After Christmas, Iona phoned, inviting me to her home for exchanging presents. I took a pair of scissors, cut cardboard insoles and placed them over the holes inside my shoes. I had no overshoes. I walked the two miles to Iona's in the slushy snow covering the gravel road. The insoles were wet and mushy by the time I arrived at the Robertson residence. I wiped my feet thoroughly on the rug inside the back door so they wouldn't track.

Iona's mother was present when I arrived. She answered when I spoke to her, but was silent after that brief exchange. Mrs. Robertson, a deeply religious, middle-aged lady, preferred her daughter associate with boys and girls who attended Sunday school and church as Lorraine and Iona were required to do regularly. Iona and I enjoyed refreshments and exchanged presents in the living room, avoiding giving Mrs. Robertson any indication I was familiar with the house, especially Iona's room. I politely said goodbye to Mrs. Robertson and walked through the kitchen to the back door with Iona. We kissed briefly at the door. I left, trudging through the freezing slush and arriving home in time to do evening chores and milk my cow.

Dad monopolized the Chevy, forcing me to go through Mom the few times I was allowed to drive it. I received a call for presenting my act at a Des Moines convention. Mom approached Dad concerning my driving the car the evening of the upcoming performance. I feared he would insist upon driving me there. Instead, Dad okayed my taking the car for that occasion. I asked Bob, Lorraine and Iona to accompany me on the Des Moines trip. Lorraine was unable to go, but Bob and Iona joined me, waiting in the car when I went inside to perform the ventriloquist act. I put the \$3 away.

Popular music included "With the Wind and the Rain in Your Hair," "High on a Windy Hill," "Fools Rush In," and "Blue Champagne."

Clayton Harlow, a tall lanky young man a couple years younger than me, lived on a farm home back in the field east of the Ontario schoolhouse. He often walked the half-mile to our house. "Clate" or "Harlow," as we called him, usually spent long hours with us and joined us for meals a good deal of the time. His presence didn't go unnoticed by Dad, who was exceptionally hospitable to friends and relatives, occasionally asked, "Doesn't that guy have a home?"

Bob had traded his roadster for a 1935 Ford V-8 four-door with a radio. One Sunday afternoon, shortly before graduation, Harlow, Bob, Lorraine, Iona and I took a drive in the country. Clate drove. The rest of us occupied the back seat. Harlow took a curve a little too fast. The car slid sideways on the gravel and rolled over, landing on its top. The girls screamed endlessly.



**Clayton Harlow**



Lorraine kicked out the back window, crawled through the opening and scratched her legs badly on the jagged glass. Iona complained of sore ribs. Harlow, Bob and I had minor bruises.

A car stopped. The driver offered to help, taking the girls home. Several of us rolled the car back on its wheels.

Iona's dad took her to the hospital in Ames. A couple of her ribs had been broken. Mrs. Robertson seized upon the accident as proof Iona should stay away from me. Bob and Lorraine stopped seeing each other.

I visited Iona in the hospital and then dropped by George's house. His cousin, Betty Langford, from Jefferson, Iowa, was visiting the Griders. She and I hit it off. I dated her afterward, making a trip with George to Jefferson. She arranged a date for him. We drove out to a park and spent the evening on two separate blankets.

I took the last \$2.50 out of my bank savings account, putting it with my recent earnings, giving me enough to pay for the pictures. May arrived. I still had no money for a suit. Dad and I had been on the outs since he deprived us of the car we had earned. I couldn't count on him for financial help.

"You go ahead and get measured for a suit," said Mom.

"I don't have any money, Mom" I said pathetically.

"You go ahead anyway," she said. "I talked to Bruce. He hasn't forgotten that you bought him the new bike when you had money. He'll pay for your suit."

"He will? That's a shock. I don't know what to say."

"You thank Bruce when you get a chance."

"Well, thank you, Mom. I'll be sure to thank Bruce, too."

I went to Don Beam Clothiers on Main Street in Ames and ordered a blue suit with thin gray stripes. It came with two pair of pants.

George Grider had been seeing Arlene Passmore, a short, rather plump, blondish, blue-eyed girl who lived near him in Ames. She was a junior in high school. Arlene played the accordion and at times, appeared on the same shows I did. She and George selected days to be out of school with "colds." He reported she came to his house where they read sex books and experimented with their newfound knowledge.

Paul was the only family member to attend my graduation. After the ceremony, Paul, George Grider, Bob Clouser and I took the girls we were dating at the time to a roadside cabin at the west end of Boone. Eight of us occupied one huge cabin, drinking beer, joking, laughing and making love or some feeble attempt at it. We left in time to get the girls home by their deadlines.

Aunt Maxine, Mother's younger sister, worked at a Montgomery Ward store in Omaha. She asked her manager to give me a tryout as a stock clerk after my graduation. Mom insisted I show my appreciation for Maxine's effort on my behalf, so I hitchhiked to Omaha and went to work at Wards. I looked forward to receiving mail. Iona wrote that Bob and Lorraine were going



together again. I missed my family and friends and detested the long indoor hours, six days a week.

At work, I took every opportunity to get out into the sunshine. I ate lunch alone out on a fire escape, overlooking the "Andiron Hotel," often remaining out there after the lunch period ended. Maxine had learned I would be given notice. She assured me only a few actually remain at that job and came up with employment applications of other firms. I filled them out and mailed them.

My work ended at Wards. I was anxious to return home, hoping George Grider would have work for me. His was outdoor work in the fresh air and sunshine. Just before I was to leave Omaha for home, a telegram arrived from Kresge's Five and Dime Stores, another of my aunt's suggested contacts. The telegram offered me \$22 a week, a third more than I had made at Wards, as a stock clerk - inside work again. We wired my acceptance to Kresge headquarters. I received a confirmation telegram instructing me to report by 9:00 a.m. the following Monday morning at a dime store on Chicago's north side.

I hitchhiked home from Omaha and immediately looked in the Tribune for someone advertising a ride to Chicago. There was only one such ad. I phoned the number in the paper. A young man named Judd Thompson, an acquaintance of Bruce, was driving the 350 miles to Chicago Sunday afternoon and had room for a passenger. I arranged to ride with him.

On Sunday morning, Dad, Mom and I were in the dining room. The phone rang. Mom answered, detecting Iona's voice. Mom never cared for Iona, so she abruptly turned the phone over to me. I said as little as possible and hung up, knowing both parents were listening to my end of the conversation.

"Well," I said. "Clouser and I are both going to church with the girls."

"Church?" Dad queried with raised eyebrows.

"Well," I explained, "we hafta go half way."

"When will you go all the way?"

"What's wrong with right after church?"

Mom and Dad burst into laughter. What I had considered a secret was out in the open at last.

Clouser came by for me in his black '35 Ford. We met the girls at Ontario Church. Iona managed to ignore her mother's disapproving glances. After church, I got behind the steering wheel of the Ford with Iona at my side. Bob and Lorraine occupied the back seat. I drove north, crossing the railroad tracks, passing the schoolhouse, then drove past our house and down over the hill to Mott's lane. I drove down the lane a good distance from the road and pulled off onto the grass. Bob and Lorraine took a blanket and disappeared into the thick timber. Iona and I walked in the opposite direction with the remaining blanket.

Arlene Passmore spent her summers in Chicago with two of her female cousins. George gave me her address and phone number, telling me to let her know I was there.



I rode to the "Windy City" with Judd and checked in at the Lincoln-Belmont YMCA near the Kresge 5 and 10 Cent Store where I was going to work. I immediately wrote Iona, addressing her by the pet name, "Fayona," and giving her my new address.

The indoor work was similar to the stockroom work I had done in Omaha. I knew from that dismal experience the inside work six days a week would leave me as pale as a ghost.

I phoned Arlene from my YMCA room to let her know I was in the "Windy City." She was pleased to learn someone from home was there and jotted down my phone number at the "Y." One evening after work I got a call. It was Arlene phoning to inform me Glenn Miller and his orchestra would soon appear at the Aragon Ballroom on the near north side. The Glenn Miller Band was the number one dance band in the country. Arlene said she would meet me after work at the "Y" one evening for going dancing to the Miller band.

She arrived at my door ahead of time that evening. I was still dressing. She came in to wait. I had purchased a half pint of "Four Roses" whiskey to take to the dance. I slid the little bottle into the inside pocket of my graduation suit coat and finished dressing. Arlene and I took the elevator to the first floor. As we crossed the lobby, a man at the registration desk motioned to me. I tugged at Arlene's hand.

"Wait a minute," I said. "That guy wants something."

I left Arlene standing in the lobby and walked back to the registration desk.

"Ladies are not allowed in the rooms," he said..

"Oh," I replied. "I didn't know that. Thanks!"

I rejoined Arlene.

"What did he want?"

"He said 'ladies are not allowed in the rooms'!"

She burst into laughter.

"He's a little late, huh?" I said.

"Now we'll have something to write home about," she quipped. "God, George and Iona will never believe we didn't do anything."

Once at the Aragon, we located a booth close to the dance floor, ordered cokes and spiked them with "Four Roses" whiskey. I looked out to the stage. There stood Glenn Miller, leading the large band, his familiar music echoing through the extensive ballroom. As we danced, Arlene and I sang along with the others on the floor. We sat occasionally to sip our spiked drinks and thoroughly enjoyed a memorable night.

Arlene gave me directions for boarding the "L" to reach her cousins' apartment on Chicago's west side. I made the trip one Sunday afternoon and met her cousins. The older of the two was in her mid twenties. The younger lady, a year older than me, was engaged to a young man her age with a keen sense of humor. From the time we met, he and I commenced exchanging clever remarks. Arlene had purchased new 78 rpm recordings, including "Green Eyes" and "Maria Alaina." We played her records over and





over on a small record player. Late in the evening, I walked to the "L" in the darkness and made my way back to the "Y."

One sunny Sunday afternoon, Arlene and I rode the streetcar to North Beach and swam in Lake Michigan. We had dressed with bathing suits beneath our clothing. At the beach, I removed my shirt and the pair of graduation suit pants, placing them on a beach blanket. While we were swimming, my new pants were stolen. I rode home on a streetcar wearing only the bathing trunks and shirt. Luckily, the suit came with two pair of pants.

My Aunt Maxine wrote from Omaha that she would be in Chicago on the Fourth of July to attend the New York Yankees – White Sox baseball game at Comiskey Park and asked if I could meet her there. Arlene and I went to the game. Maxine swore me to secrecy. She was with a gentleman friend. I kept her secret.

That day, July 4, 1941, we witnessed sports history. Joe Di Magio, batting for the Yankees, hit his 43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> home runs. The song, "Joltin' Joe Di Magio," was written about his accomplishment that day. It became quite popular.

During a visit to the apartment, I was asked to be the best man for Arlene's cousin and fiancé. Their wedding day was set for the Sunday before Labor Day. I promised to stand up for him.

One morning shortly after the store opened, I delivered supplies to the back of the lunch counter. I looked up to see brother Paul and George Grider seated on stools across the counter. I was stunned. George had driven his 1928 Chevy from Iowa for a brief visit with Arlene. He and Paul commented on my pallor. The next day I resigned and rode home with them. I avoided driving by sitting at the left rear car window to absorb the sunshine.

We reached Ames early in the evening. George drove through town and on out to our farm. I followed Paul and George into the house. Mom welcomed them. She asked about their trip, then noticed me and stopped short.

"What are you doing home?" Mom asked in amazement.

My quitting the Chicago job had let her down. Luckily, Dad was in Idaho working on his sister's house. I knew our Omaha relatives would be disappointed in me.

"Well," Mom went on, "I suppose you're all hungry."

True to form, she hurried into the kitchen, put meat in the frying pan and commenced setting the dining room table.

"Mrs. Clark," George said in an attempt to alleviate Mom's disparagement, "I had never seen Bob so pale. He looked like he'd been in a dungeon."

Mom hesitated in her work to listen. Without answering, she went on preparing the meal. In no time, that good home cookin' I had missed was on the table. Mom disappeared through the door leading to the bathroom. The



three of us ate heartily. After eating, George drove home. I phoned Iona. Her mother answered, curtly informing me her daughter was not available.

Although the farm chores were being done by my younger brothers and sisters, I helped by pumping and carrying water, chopping wood and performing general farm jobs. I got tanned working shirtless in the garden and was thrilled to be active in the clean fresh air and sunshine. Summer was ending and garden work nearly over.

While in Omaha and Chicago, I had pined for home. Why did I feel like such a misfit now that I was back?

I finally reached Iona on the telephone. She said she had been babysitting to earn money and informed me she would be at Lorraine's. I knew that meant her mother was listening.

The next evening, Bob Clouser stopped for me. We drove to Lorraine's and picked up Lorraine and Iona. I hadn't seen "Fayona" since before leaving for Chicago. We drove to George's and visited as we milled around the driveway on the north side of the house. Iona climbed into the rumble seat. I commented on the various types of work George was doing.

"He's the best all-around guy I know," she said.

I was pleased she liked my friend. She and Paul had often gotten into spats. And she had told me Bob Clouser had made a pass at her the night the two of them waited in the car for me when I presented the ventriloquist act in Des Moines. I explained I would be away over the upcoming Labor Day weekend as I had promised to be best man at a wedding in Chicago.

Saturday, the day before the wedding, I walked to Ames, hitchhiking from the southeast corner of Lincoln Way and Duff Avenue. I arrived in Chicago about 2:00 a.m. the next morning.

I walked from the highway where the driver let me out of his car. There were no lights on in the apartment. I tried the front door. It was locked. Avoiding awakening anyone, I walked to a nearby park and slept on a bench. I awakened in the chilly dew at daylight, walked back to the apartment and knocked on the door. Arlene's older cousin appeared, informed me the others were still sleeping and invited me inside.

Early that afternoon, I changed into my graduation suit. A small gathering assembled in the apartment living room. The marriage ceremony was brief. I couldn't help thinking what I was putting myself through to be present for those few minutes. We enjoyed refreshments and the newlyweds left. Early the next morning, Labor Day, I was back out on the highway.

I caught a ride to Cedar Rapids, arriving as the sun was setting. After a brief period, letting each approaching driver see my raised thumb, a car stopped for me. The driver, a young man in his twenties, introduced himself as Bill Stoner. His dad owned Stoner Piano Company and the Stoner building in downtown Des Moines. The building housed the piano outlet and radio station WHO, where "Dutch" Reagan had been sportscaster. Bill recognized me from on-air performances at WHO studios. In Bill's eyes, I was a



celebrity. "Sunrise Serenade," Frankie Carle's famous song by the Glenn Miller Orchestra, played on his car radio.

Rather than letting me out at Ames and turning south to head for Des Moines, Bill insisted on taking me home. Iona had told me she and her mother were to attend a party Labor Day evening at a home a few doors south of hers. I asked Bill to let me out there. He did, then headed for Des Moines.

I saw a shaft of light at the back door and walked toward it. The door was open. A screen door prevented insects getting inside. Looking in through the screen I saw Iona. I called to her. She came to the door, but remained inside. We spoke briefly with the screen between us. I asked her to come outside. She said she couldn't join me outside because her mother was there. I thought that was strange. After all, Iona had told me she would be there with her mother. I assumed she meant I could find her there when I returned from Chicago. Rather than cause friction between Iona and her mother, I departed, walking the two long miles along the gravel roads and arriving home after the family had gone to bed.

A few days later, Paul and I were walking out from Ames on Ontario Road. He pointed down on the gravel. There was a discarded rubber. Paul laughed, saying George told him he tossed it out of the car after having relations with Iona while I attended the Chicago wedding.

I went to George's house the next day and asked him if what Paul said was true. He said it not only was true, but that Iona had promised to tell me the two had been dating. He said Iona considered informing me to be her duty. He was surprised she hadn't told me.

When I got home, I wrote Iona a note and phoned her. I asked if she would be home. She told me to come over. I walked to her house and knocked at the back door. Her mother answered, saying Iona was in her room. I walked through the kitchen, dining room and into Iona's room, not caring that Ms. Robinson saw that I knew which was her daughter's room.

"Here," I said, handing Iona the note. "Read this."

She turned on her dresser lamp and unfolded the page. I waited until she had commenced reading then turned and walked out, passing her mother in the dining room. Without a word I hurried through the kitchen and out the back door. I walked the two miles home.

I thought back to when we first dated, recalling Iona had avoided informing Oley that she considered their relationship ended. I knew Oley was hurt and blamed me. Now I was going through what Oley had experienced. I didn't blame George.

He and I drove his old Ford truck twenty miles to a coal mine on the bank of the Des Moines River west of Boone and loaded it with coal, unloading half at our house and the other half at his.

One Friday night George asked Paul and me to accompany him and Iona to an Ames High football game at Marshalltown. Paul and I sat in the back



seat of George's 1928 Chevy. One of the latest popular songs kept running through my mind. I commenced singing.

"You promised me love that would never die.  
The promise you made was only a lie.  
Now that you're gone all alone I pine.  
All that I've got is a worried mind.  
When I was down you left me there.  
I needed you so but you didn't care."

Iona turned to face me, saying sadly, "Oh, Bobby." I finished the song. George stopped dating Iona and commenced dating Arlene again.

I often took the 410 shot gun along with Brownie, a black, brown and white Fox Terrier, and "D." the big brown mixed St. Bernard and Collie dog, and went hunting. The dogs always got excited when I stepped outside with the gun, showing their pleasure by prancing around me and racing ahead, their ears and tails alive with movement. We bagged pheasants, quail, squirrels and rabbits. I cleaned the game and Mom cooked it into the finest of meals.

Then came Pearl Harbor Day. On Monday morning, December 8<sup>th</sup>, I walked the three miles to campus town, stopping at Smutz brothers' filling station to relieve myself. The twin brothers, in their late twenties, operated a filling station on the south side of Lincoln Way, south of the Iowa State College campus. Dad traded there. Just to the left of the entrance sat a small radio on a shelf.

I hesitated to listen. President Roosevelt was introduced. When the tumultuous applause died away he spoke.

"Yesterday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941," the president commenced, "a day that will live in infamy . . ."



## CHAPTER 2

Dad returned from Idaho for Christmas. Bruce was also home from his elevator construction work. On December 25, 1941, we held the last Christmas gathering to include all family members for some years.

Paul's grades in school were rather low. He was thinking of dropping out as Bruce had done. Bruce intended to join Dad when he returned to Idaho in the spring. They would build a home for my uncle's brother at Dingle, Idaho.

Dad and Mom discussed the possibility of Paul transferring out there to attend school with my cousins. He wanted to continue playing football. By the end of the school semester at Ames High, early in 1942, Paul was a full semester behind.

Everett Grider, George's dad, a soldier training ROTC troops at the college, owned a team of horses used for various types of work, including slipping dirt to dig basements and grading lawns. Working the team and putting his old Ford truck to use, George contracted landscaping jobs. I could work for him in the spring, but, first I had to find work for the winter.

I constantly scanned the classified ads in the Ames Tribune. One day I spied an ad for a bus boy at "The Grid," a bus top restaurant at the Sheldon-Munn Hotel in the heart of Ames' business district.

I was interviewed by Miss Jennings, manager of "The Grid." She was a tall portly lady with black hair and piercing dark brown eyes. Miss Jennings questioned my short-term work as stock clerk at Montgomery Ward in Omaha and the Chicago Kresge variety store. I couldn't tell her I didn't like inside work. That is what I was applying for again. I said I accepted short-term work until I could find a permanent job. After studying my application, she commenced explaining the work.

"This job is seven days a week," she said tersely. "The pay is 25 cents an hour plus meals. The waitresses will share their tips with you. Can you start tomorrow?"

"Sure!" I said with enthusiasm.

"Be here at 6 o'clock in the morning. Now, you have to be on time! Busses start arriving early. Your shift is six 'til two. Try to squeeze your lunch in around eleven. We have to stay ahead of that noon rush."

"I understand," I said. "Thank you, Miss Jennings."

I had to rent a room. Again relying upon the newspaper classified ads, I located a rooming house three blocks from the hotel and rented a bed in an attic dormitory. I could walk to work on those cold snowy dark depressing mornings of the country's early days at war.



One of the renters had a radio. Beginning about 5:00 a.m. each morning the war news echoed through the attic. I rushed to get bathroom space and cut cardboard to slide inside my shoes to cover the holes. I dressed quickly and trotted down the stairs and out into the frigid crisp air, trudging through the snow, ice and slush.

The Ames Tribune for January 31, 1942 carried a headline that read:

### **SINGAPORE SITUATION CRITICAL**

The line beneath went on:

### **British Forces Pushed Back To Island; Dutch Navy Base and New Guinea Assaulted**

The worldwide war news was dizzying. The Chinese had been defending its territory against the invading Japs for years. The Americans and Filipinos were locked in a life-or-death struggle to hold back Jap advances in the Philippines. It seemed the Japs were everywhere. Their submarines threatened our west coast. Germans seemed to be everywhere the Japs weren't. Their submarines swarmed our east coast.

The Germans had long since taken all of Europe and were fighting in many places throughout the world including deep inside Russia and in Africa. Another report bore this headline:

### **RAF HOLDS AT BENGHAZI American Built Planes Helping To Spread Havoc**

In the same issue was information referring to government land 10 Miles north of Des Moines and about twenty miles south of our farm.

*Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, notified Governor George A. Wilson today that the U. S. government will assume full control of the 1,997 acres surrounding the Ankeny munitions plant February 5 at 10:00 a.m. Any criminal violation will amount to a federal offence. The army will police the grounds.*

Breaking ground for building the new ordnance plant, located a couple miles west of the town of Ankeny, 10 miles north of Des Moines, was soon announced. One of the prime jokes during construction went like this: A worker had carried a plank around on his shoulder day after day. One day he noticed someone following him. He finally stopped and dropped the plank.

"That's it!" he shouted. "I quit!"

The man who had been following raced over to him.

"No," the second guy shouted. "Don't quit! I was assigned to follow you."

The restaurant manager was strict, her dark penetrating eyes reinforcing her every command. Miss Jennings specialized in personally baking hot cross buns, a daily menu item.

I seldom saw George Grider. He worked long hours. Another friend from the class of '41, Leonard De Hoet, Jr., worked at the State Highway Commission on Lincoln Way in Ames. He had been dubbed, "Smiley" or "Smiles" as a kid. Smiles stood nearly six feet tall and weighed around 170 pounds with dark hair and blue eyes.



During the spring of 1942, Smiles and I met occasionally at Fall Inn, a truck stop three blocks east of the Highway Commission on Lincoln Way and about the same distance south of the rooming house where I was staying. He lived with his parents and four brothers.

Paul had met Smiley's younger brother, Bob, when the two were matched to box at an Ames boxing tournament. Bob, chunkily built, was about Paul's height and weight with dark sandy hair and blue eyes. They shared a mutual love for playing football.

At Kurtz Restaurant, Fall Inn, Frangos Restaurant, The Maid-Rite, The Pantry, State Café, Tom's Grill, Rainbow Café, and other Ames restaurants we played the jukeboxes at 5 cents a record – six plays for a quarter.

We were extraordinarily fortunate. By tuning a radio or putting nickels in jukeboxes, we were able to enjoy the music of the world's finest orchestras. Among them were the big bands of Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Paul Whiteman, Dick Jergens, Horace Height, Vaughn Monroe, Gene Krupa, Bobby Sherwood and Kay Kyser. At restaurants, we guys usually ordered grilled cheese sandwiches, the most reasonable selection on most menus, drank 7-Up or Coke from the uniquely Coke-shaped green bottles and put nickels in jukeboxes.

Among the popular songs were "Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose in Ireland," "Elmer's Tune," "The Ballad of Roger Young," "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," "One Dozen Roses," "Jingle Jangle Jingle," "Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree," "Jersey Bounce," "Somebody Else Is Taking My Place," "Tangerine," "I Don't Want to Walk Without You," "Moonlight Cocktails" and "Sleepy Lagoon." Smiley always played Kate Smith's "God Bless America" on the jukebox at Fall Inn.

Paul got a job as dishwasher at Frangos restaurant. He rented a bed in the attic dormitory where I was staying.

Work at The Grid often became hectic. Passengers rushed inside during brief bus stops to be served quickly. When in the kitchen, it was my responsibility to keep an eye on dining room activity. I constantly glanced out the small windows in the swinging doors separating the kitchen and dining areas. The fast moving waitresses whisked dirty dishes from the serving counter and booth tables, placing them in metal rectangular tubs behind the counter and at each end of the row of booths. I rushed through the doors, grabbed each filled tub and hurried it into the kitchen where the dishes were washed.

During rush periods, the waitresses were too busy to clear the dirty dishes. Then I stepped in, cleared the counter and tabletops and placed the dirty dishes in the metal tubs. Once cleared, I placed tumblers of fresh water on the tables and lunch counter, accompanied by silverware and napkins. During extreme rushes, I also assisted the waitresses serving food to the anxious customers.

The most tedious work was cleaning the grill, a flat 2" thick aluminum 3' x 3' slab used for frying hamburgers, eggs, bacon and other grilled items.



Cleaning it required scraping with a porous coral rock to loosen the black burned grease, then wiping the grill top with a white towel until clean.

As a busboy I hadn't been able to save much money toward the purchase of a car. Spring was coming. I kept in touch with George Grider. He assured me there would be work.

Paul landed a better job at the Iowa State College print shop.

One cold wintry day at The Grid, I glanced through the swinging door window and spied two filled tubs behind the lunch counter in the dining room. I rushed through the swinging doors, picked up the furthest loaded tub and commenced backing toward the kitchen.

"How are ya, Bob?" came the familiar voice from the other side of the counter.

I looked up. Facing me on a counter stool was Dad with a cup of coffee in front of him.

"Okay," I called back, pressing my rear end into the swinging doors and backing into the kitchen.

I left the tub of dirty dishes beside the dishwasher and hurried back for the second tub.

"Would you have a little cash I could get?" Dad asked softly.

I stopped, reached in the right rear pants pocket, pulled out my billfold, removed the lonely five-dollar bill and slid it onto the counter near his saucer.

"Thanks," he said quietly, placing his left hand over the bill. "I'll get it back to ya."

I grabbed the remaining metal tub and carried it to the kitchen. After a few minutes at work in the kitchen, I glanced through the swinging door window. Dad was still at the counter eating a piece of pie.

I realized he had waited until he was sure he had the money before ordering pie. He had evidently come in with a nickel for a cup of coffee, but may have had little or no more.

The next time I looked through the swinging door window, Dad was gone. How embarrassing it must have been for him, asking me for money. From the time we moved to the farm, Dad had gotten remodeling work as a result of those he had done work for recommending him. Key personnel at the lumberyards also referred him. His work was especially slow during the winter.

When Dad was sure the Idaho winter was ending. He, Bruce and Paul drove west and started construction on a new home at the south side of Dingle for Uncle Mitch's brother.

At the first signs of the 1942 Iowa spring, George Grider commenced landscaping and digging basements. He needed help. I gave notice at work and the rooming house.

On my last day of work at the Grid I hurried from the kitchen through the swinging doors into the dining room to carry out the dirty dish tubs. Miss Jennings stood near the cash register, talking to several of the waitresses.



"Today is his last day," she said.

"Have you hired a replacement?" asked one of the girls.

"Not yet," replied Miss Jennings. "But I'll tell you this - we'll never get anyone as smart."

The menial job had gotten me through the winter and I gained the respect of the waitresses, kitchen crew and a stern manager. To Mom, of course, it meant I had quit another job.

The family's food was largely from the gardens and what was brought home from hunting outings. Mom sometimes sent my younger brothers and sisters, either on bicycle or afoot, to Ontario for certain grocery items. With Dad, Bruce and Paul away, she relied upon me to bring groceries from Ames.

I was happy to be living back at the old home place with the family even though it meant walking and hitchhiking to and from town along dusty gravel roads. Those 1942 spring mornings were highlighted by brilliant sunrises, clean crisp fresh air, soft chilly breezes and blue skies with fleecy white clouds. The black rich soil was beginning to turn an Easter green. Farmers planted their tilled fields using teams of horses and tractors. Birds sang as if the world was at peace, not war.

Grider's work kept him busy. I hitchhiked to town each day. George assigned me to specific jobs. Some days I drove his old Ford truck out to the rock quarry north of Ames, loading it by lifting heavy flagstone slabs, heaving them up into the huge steel box on back of the truck. I piled the slabs on until the load was heaped and the rear tires were depressed, then drove out of the craggy quarry area, down a dirt lane to the gravel road and to homes where landscaping was under way. I got up on the rock pile in the truck bed and tossed the huge slabs off onto soft dirt to keep them from chipping or breaking.

Other days I drove a team of horses, slipping dirt to level lawns. I usually worked stripped to the waist and soon became tanned. Leg, arm, shoulder and back muscles were often sore, but developing. I had never felt better.

I thought of Iona and the sad way our relationship had ended. But, I always got that warm feeling recalling that little girl I had met years before at the swimming pool. I could still see her bright blue sparkling eyes. Why did her vision keep coming back to me?

Many evenings George, Smiley, Bob De Hoet and I often got together at the duckpin bowling alley in Ames. After bowling, we went to one of the many restaurants.

Telephone conversations at the farm continued to be laced with line static and low voice volume. I received a phone call that spring from Lenora Wright, an old friend from country school days. I had considered her my childhood girlfriend. In the late 30s, Lenora and her family moved from a farm a mile east of Ontario School to one at Shellsburg, near Cedar Rapids, in eastern Iowa. She phoned from Iowa State College where she was attending 4-H meetings. We arranged to get together.



During the spring a year earlier, Lenora had come to Ames and phoned me between 4-H sessions at Iowa State. I had walked from home to the campus to meet her. At that time she was on a tight schedule and our meeting was very brief. We talked only a few minutes and I walked all the way home.

This time she arranged more time for us. The evening after she called, Lenora met me at the duckpin bowling alley on the north side, at the east end of Main Street in Ames. Having saved some of my earnings, I could afford to take a girl out. That gave me a warm feeling.

We talked of the days at the one-room country school and laughed at things we had done as kids. During a pie social, I had bid a custard pie up to ten cents. The auctioneer said I had bought it. I was pleasantly surprised to learn it was Lenora's entry. That meant she and I sat together, eating the pie she had baked. We recalled dozens of "old days" incidents.

I introduced her to Smiley and other guys our age. As we bowled the evening away, her warm smile and heavenly blue eyes endeared her to my friends. Two or three of them even had the nerve to comment on the light blue sweater emphasizing her prominent breasts.

I wasn't cognizant of how quickly my time with Lenora had slipped away. We left the duckpin alley about 11:00 p.m. Smiley walked to Lincoln Way with Lenora and me. From that point he continued south. Lenora and I walked west along Lincoln Way the five blocks to the rooming house where she and her 4-H friends were staying. After arriving at the house, she and I stood out on the sidewalk talking. She finally reached out, clasping my hands in hers.

"Well, I know you have a long way to go," she said. "I used to live out that way ... remember?"

"Oh, I remember alright," I said. "I remember the farewell party at your place."

"Oh, yes," she laughed. "That was some event."

"And I hated to see you go then, too."

Lenora turned, walked toward the house and up the steps to the front porch. I watched from the sidewalk.

"Goodbye," I called. "Write me."

"I will. Goodbye, Bob."

As Lenora reached the darkness of the porch, strains of "Red River Valley," a song we had sung as kids at Ontario School, drifted back.

"From this valley they say you are going.

We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile.

For they say you've taken the sunshine.

That has brightened our pathway awhile".

I walked back a couple blocks to the hitchhiking corner in front of Woodland Dairy at Lincoln Way and Grand. The business was closed. Betty Price worked at Woodland Dairy, serving dairy products to the public and making ice cream sodas and malts behind the soda fountain. She and her



family lived with the Griders. Her mother was Griders' housekeeper. Later, she and Everett were married. Betty was 2 years younger than George and me. She was about our height with long black hair, hazel eyes and a trim figure.

Lenora married shortly after our evening at the duckpin alley, changing her name from Wright to Scott. She and I continued to correspond.

Dad had driven the family's only car to Idaho. Getting to and from Ames without a vehicle meant walking, hitchhiking and relying upon others. I had been unable to save the money needed to buy a car, but did spot a '29 Chevy advertised for sale in the newspaper. I phoned the number in the ad to obtain the address where the car could be seen and asked Mom to loan me \$25.

Mom was uncomfortable making a decision on my buying a car without consulting Dad. Mindful of the hard feelings resulting from Paul and I losing use of the car we earned the summer of 1940, mom avoided broaching the question to Dad. As hard as it was to save that kind of cash, Mom cut the discussion short by handing me two tens and a five dollar bill.

"Now," she said assertively. "I have to have that money back!"

Remembering Dad's old adage, "Keep your mouth shut when you can and talk like hell when you have to," I took the money with a quick, "Thanks. I'll get it back!"

I got dressed and started out on foot down the dusty gravel road, hoping upon hope it would be the last time I would have to walk it. Before walking far I had hailed a ride. I explained to the driver that I was going to town to look at car that was advertised for sale. He dropped me off just east of Squaw Creek on Lincoln Way, a block south of my destination, the northeast corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Russell Avenue.

I saw the 1929 gray-green 4-door Chevy parked at the curb on the east side of Russell headed north. I kept looking back at the car as I hurried toward the house. I walked up the steps and knocked on the door. A young man in his twenties came to the door. I explained I had phoned and was there to see the car that was for sale.

I followed the stern young man as he walked briskly across the lawn to the car. He opened the driver's side front door and got in the car. He pumped the foot feed a few times and flipped the dashboard toggle switch. I stood in the street beside the opened car door watching his every move. He held the steering wheel with his left hand. His right hand pulled the gearshift into neutral. He pressed his left foot down on the clutch pedal and with his right foot, stepped on the round silver floor starter button. The motor ground but didn't start. He removed his foot from the starter button and pumped the accelerator again. Once again he pressed his right foot down on the starter button. The starter made a grinding sound. The motor started. The owner quickly moved his right foot from the starter button to the gas pedal. The motor speeded slightly and continued running.



"Now, if the battery's down," he explained, pointing to the silvery metal crank lying on the floor of the back seat, "if the battery doesn't have enough juice to turn the motor over fast enough, you'll have to crank it."

I nodded my understanding. He turned the motor off, shoved the gearshift into reverse and released the clutch pedal to keep the car from rolling.

"I don't know how old that battery is." The young man explained, pulling up the badly worn fabric floor mat to the right of the gearshift, revealing the top of the battery, then dropping the floor mat. He got out of the car.

"Go ahead," he invited. "Try it."

The owner walked around the front of the car and stood on the curb. I opened the car door, got in and closed the door. I flipped the toggle switch, pumped the foot feed and stepped on the starter. The car lurched backward.

"Be sure it's out of gear!" called the young man. "That emergency brake won't hold it. You have to put it in gear when you park it, so ya have to be sure it's out of gear when ya start it."

I felt a little dumb, but I ignored my mistake and proceeded to start the motor. I pressed the clutch pedal down with my left foot and moved the gearshift lever to what felt like the neutral position. With my left foot, depressing the clutch pedal, I stepped on starter button once more with my right foot. The motor started. I quickly moved my right foot from the starter button to the accelerator, keeping the motor running. I pressed the gearshift up to the left, slowly released the clutch pedal and backed the car a few feet. I pressed the clutch and brake pedals down, stopping the car. Then I pulled the gearshift down to the left into low gear, slowly let the brake and clutch pedals up and pressed the accelerator pedal down slightly, pulled the car forward and stopped where it had originally rested.

Depressing the clutch and brake pedals, I pushed the gearshift up to the left. Leaving the gearshift in the reverse position, I let the clutch and brake pedals come back up and flipped the toggle switch to the "off" position. The motor stopped. I opened the door, stepped out of the car and closed the door.

"And what were you asking for it?" I asked.

"Twenty-five dollars," he came back. "I can't take any less."

I removed the billfold from my right rear pants pocket, took out the bills Mom had lent me and handed them to him. He counted the money and pressed the bills into the right front pocket of his pants with his right hand. He pulled the title out of a shirt pocket with the left hand.

"Here's the title," he said, handing it to me. "I've signed it. With the toggle switch, you don't need a key. Use regular gas. You're all set."

I drove home a 13-year old vehicle - my first car - and came up with the money for the registration and license plates.

Iowa's 99 counties were listed on license plates alphabetically by number, followed by a dash and a longer set of numbers. Story County plates started



with "85." We usually knew which county drivers were from by looking at the left side of the plate.

I immediately named my '29 Chevy "Jessie." She had steel 19-inch disc wheels with badly worn tires mounted on clincher rims. I soon learned tires of that size were no longer manufactured. Being wartime, a tire shortage had developed. I continuously searched, often looking behind filling stations, for discarded tires. At times I had to carry two or three spares. When a tire went down or blew out, I jacked up the wheel requiring attention, removed the rim, picked up the tire irons and pried the flat tire and tube off the rim, patched the inner tube, placed boots or flattened number 10 tin cans against the weak tire wall, inserted the inner tube, grasped tire irons again and pried the tire back onto the rim. The clincher rims were notorious for springing open unexpectedly when tires were being mounted and their sharp edges doing harm to the hands or other parts of the body.

I showed off old "Jessie" to my friends - the De Hoet (Pronounced Dee-Hoot) brothers, Smiles and Bob - George Grider and Bill Valline.

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, J. Edgar Hoover announced the arrest of eight German saboteurs who had come ashore at Amagansett, Long Island and Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. The saboteurs possessed explosives, primers, incendiaries, maps and plans for a two-year program of destruction to U. S. war plants, railways, water works and bridges. They had made the voyage across the Atlantic by submarine. Four had rowed ashore at Long Island on June 13<sup>th</sup>, in a collapsible rubber boat containing clothing, explosives and several thousand dollars in cash. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, four other saboteurs landed from a submarine south of Jacksonville.

I drove to George's house at 1429 Burnett Avenue on the days he had work for me, left Jessie there beside his 1928 Chevy while I worked, then returned for it at the end of the day. I took Mom's grocery list with me on days she needed groceries and did the shopping. Things were going well, but I was making slow progress paying Mom back.

George, Bob DeHoet, Bill Valline and I planned to drive old Jessie to Riverview, the Des Moines amusement park, on the Fourth of July.

My work varied, sometimes digging trenches for concrete footings with a shovel. Other days I drove the old Model B Ford dump truck to the rock quarry where I loaded limestone slabs.

One hot sunny day, I had to slip dirt with a team of horses, leveling a lawn at a new Campus Town home. I drove the team to the residence, arriving about 9:00 a.m. I removed my shirt and undershirt. After working an hour or so, I felt the slight sting of the bright sun on my bare shoulders.

"Hi, Bob," a female voice called.

I turned to see Donna Matson sitting on the concrete front steps.

"Hi, Donna!" I answered.

Donna Matson was a year younger than me and had just graduated from Ames High. That bright sunny morning she looked especially attractive sitting on the concrete front steps in white shorts and halter. Donna stood about



five foot, four inches tall and weighed about 115 pounds. She had a pretty smile, big brown eyes and long black hair that curled to bounce on her shoulders. When I was in school, she had been referred to as a "sweater girl."

Donna was known to be going steady with an old friend, Bud Beman, who lived on Knapp Street, two blocks east of our former brown house. Bud was a nephew of Dad's old boss, Ben Cole, and had been one of the better high school basketball players. His aunt, JoAnn had graduated when I did the year before. He heard of good money being made in Alaska and after graduating, had gone there to work on the Alcan Highway.

I finished the swath across the lawn, turned the team left and pulled up near the front porch.

"Whoa!" I commanded.

The team came to a stop. I stood bare to the waist with the leather reins tied behind my back.

"I didn't know you lived here, Donna," I said.

"We haven't been here long," she replied. "It's new."

"Nice home."

"Thanks," she said automatically.

"What do ya hear from Bud?" I asked

"Oh, he's still up there."

"How long will he stay? Do ya know?"

"No telling," she said dryly. "What are you going to do the Fourth?" she asked.

"Oh, a few of us guys are goin' to Riverview. What about you?"

"I don't know yet," she said, looking down. "I guess Mother and I will go somewhere."

"Good to see ya, Donna."

"You too, Bob."

I flipped the leather reins to slap the rumps of the horses. They lurched forward, pulling the slip. I grasped the wood handles tightly, aiming the lip of the slip blade into the black dirt. I made the pass back past the porch. Donna had gone inside.

I remembered her dad's death a couple years before. Dad had taken Bruce, Paul and me with him to complete a remodeling job in Maxwell, a town about 20 miles southeast of Ames. Paul and I cleaned up the yard and burned pieces of leftover lumber. We finished the work and were on our way home in Dad's 1937 red Chevy pickup, traveling north along Highway 69. We drove down Johnson Hill, five miles south of Ames, and headed up the hill. Off the road on the west side of the paved highway was a car. It had gone through a fence and come to rest in the pasture. Dad pulled the pickup onto the shoulder and stopped. Bruce and Dad got out, walked over to the car and carried Donna's dad to a waiting ambulance. He died of a heart attack.

Bill Valline, three years younger than me, stood about 5' 8", was rather thin with blue eyes and curly blondish hair. He and his family lived a block



south of Iona. Prior to going with Iona, I had dated Bill's older sister, Betty. Bob Clouser was dating Carolyn Fitch, a cousin of Betty and Bill, at that time. Carolyn was a member of the famous Fitch shampoo family in Des Moines. The Fitch Company was nationally known for its popular network radio show, "The Fitch Band Wagon." The four of us double dated just briefly. Betty met Dar Linder, an Ames man, a year or so older than me, and the two were soon married.

Bill, George, Bob De Hoet and I drove in old Jessie to Riverview on the Fourth of July. The day was marred by bickering among the three guys. I thought back to Donna's question and wondered if I hadn't missed a golden opportunity. But then she and Bud Beman were going steady. When Bud returned from Alaska he and Donna broke up. Bud married another Ames girl.

Bob De Hoet had met a girl named Julie Solyst from Roland, a small predominantly Scandinavian town about twelve miles northeast of Ames. Julie and her Roland girl friends arranged to use a local beauty shop for dancing evenings. One of the young ladies provided a 78 RPM turntable. Several of them contributed popular records.

Julie asked Bob to invite a few of his friends to meet her and her friends at the beauty shop. He asked me to invite a couple guys to "meet some Roland girls" and enjoy an evening of dancing. I asked George and Carl Martin, a high school friend who had graduated with George and me. The four of us drove to Roland in old Jessie one evening. At the beauty shop we were introduced to Julie, Lois Christian, Pauline Larson and two sisters named Johnson, Charlotte and Barbara.



**Bob met Pauline Larson, age 16, Spring of '42.**



The shop lights were dimmed, establishing a cozy dancing atmosphere. Strains of "Tangerine," "I Don't Want to Walk Without You," "Jingle Jangle Jingle," "Who Wouldn't Love You," "I've got a Gal in Kalamazoo" and "Sleepy Lagoon" drifted through the make believe ballroom.

We exchanged dancing partners throughout the evening. I kept going back to Pauline Larson, an attractive blue eyed blond of Norwegian decent. She seemed to appreciate my blundering humor. We laughed a lot, enjoyed each other's company and planned to see each other again. She mentioned an upcoming Roland Rockets boys basketball game. We agreed to go to the game.

George had danced primarily with Charlotte Johnson. I hadn't noticed anything out of the way, but the girls had judged his behavior to be less than gentlemanly and asked all of us back except him.

I drove Jessie to Roland the evening of the basketball game and called at the Larson residence for Pauline. We drove a few blocks to the high school field house.

A friend of Pauline's sat on the bleacher seat behind us. Pauline introduced me to Zona Gail Frandsen, a round faced, red-cheeked young lady with long sandy colored hair and blue eyes, who didn't use lipstick. Zona Gail had a flare for humor and was author of a school newspaper column titled "Iowa Corn." During the game, Z. G. commenced making humorous remarks. I responded with what I considered clever comebacks. Pauline appeared to be going along with the nonsense for a while. When I sensed she was no longer enjoying the exchanges, I paid more attention to her.

Smiley commenced dating Pauline. I phoned Zona Gail, asking her out to a movie at the Collegian Theater in Ames. She accepted.

She and I drove in old Jessie through the town of Roland and on west, turning south on Highway 69 leading to Ames. I had gotten the car up near its top speed. Suddenly, we heard an explosion. Sailing past my window and out across the field on the left side of the highway was a black ball made up of tire boots wrapped inside a number 10 tin can. We felt and heard thumping of the left rear wheel. The tire had blown out.

I pulled over and stopped the car beside the highway. I got out, hurried to the back of the car, unwound the wire holding the three spare tires, removed one and rewound the wire to hold the remaining tires. Ignoring the setback, we drove on to Ames. Spontaneous exchanges of humor between Zona Gail and me, plus a good film made it an enjoyable evening.

Z. G. and I went out again a few evenings later, double dating with Bob De Hoet and Julie Solyst, a cute short blue-eyed brunette who lived across the road from Pauline.

One evening, Bill Valline rode with me in old Jessie to pick up Zona Gail. I drove the three of us around Roland area gravel roads before sunset. The two of them occupied the back seat. I glanced into the rearview mirror to see both back doors opened. They were dragging her feet on the gravel as I drove along. We all laughed at their antics.



Suddenly, a highway patrolman pulled alongside. I stopped the car and soberly listened to the officer's lecture, then dutifully followed the patrolman into Roland, stopping at a Main Street auto repair shop. Bill and Z. G. used the telephone at the garage to call their parents, requesting rides home. I left old Jessie at the garage and was driven in the patrol car to the police station on the southeast corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Kellogg in Ames, across the street from The Grid restaurant.

Even if Mom had the ten dollars needed to pay my fine I knew she had no transportation, so I didn't try phoning her. I remained in jail all night not knowing how I would ever get out. Late the next afternoon I glanced out the jail window to see a familiar figure walking down the alley.

"Hey, Bill!" I called from between the bars of the open window.

"Bob?!" Bill Valline called back. "Aren't you out yet?"

Bill instructed me to wait right there, explaining his mother was at work nearby. A few minutes later I was released. Bill had paid my fine. Repaying Bill's mother further delayed reimbursing Mom the money she had lent me to buy the car.

A front page article on my arrest appeared in the Ames Tribune. When writing to Dad, Mom avoided mentioning my brush with the law. All was going well until she received a letter from Dad expressing his shock to learn I owned a car. He scolded her for not keeping him informed. Mom quickly discerned Dad was receiving the Ames Tribune in Idaho. The world had become a smaller place.

One evening our shrunken family was eating supper at the dining room table. One long and four short rings were heard from the rural telephone on the wall in the southwest corner of the room. Mom answered. Bruce had returned to Ames from Idaho and needed a ride home. I drove to Ames and met him at Kurtz Café on Main Street. Bruce sipped the last of his beer and talked with his friends. I took the opportunity to play the jukebox, inserting a nickel for each tune. I played two of Benny Goodman's hit songs - "Jersey Bounce" and "Elmer's Tune."

After leaving the restaurant, I introduced Bruce to Jessie. I drove east on Lincoln Way through Nevada and another eight miles east to Colo, a tiny community at the junction of Highways 30 (Lincoln Way) and 65. There I turned around and drove home. Bruce continued to ask about happenings in the area since he left for Idaho. I didn't feel my owning a car had impressed him. His plans were to rejoin the grain elevator construction crew.

On Friday and Saturday nights we young guys loaded in our cars and headed for The Sport Club on the second floor of a building across Nevada's main drag from the old red brick courthouse. That dance hall presented fine orchestras that played many simulations of big band hit recordings. It was the county's meeting place for young people.

Eddie Gibb, son of my parents' campus town friends, a '42 Ames High graduate, frequented the dance hall. Eddie was about my height and weight with golden curly hair interlaced with darker streaks. His girl friend, Carlene



Sharp, a blue-eyed blond, a couple inches shorter than Eddie, lived in Nevada. The two of them danced the nights away at The Sport Club.

Betty and Bill Price, sister and brother whose family shared the home with the Griders, were regulars at The Sport Club. Bill had flaming red hair, contrasting with Betty's black hair. He was tall and lanky and a couple years younger than Betty, who had just completed her junior year at Ames High. The pair was outstanding at the jitterbug. When the band played a fast number, many of us stood and watched Eddie, Carlene, Bill and Betty perform the jitterbug, applauding and shouting wildly at the end.

The Des Moines and Ames newspapers carried stories of the ordnance plant under construction at Ankeny, a small town about 10 miles north of Des Moines, 22 miles south of Ames. The new plant, operated by the U. S. Rubber Company, commenced hiring in the summer of 1942. I drove old Jessie down to the plant office one morning and filled out an application.

The July 7, 1942 Ames Tribune carried news of Army and Navy cadets arriving to take flight training at Iowa State College. Another article in that issue announced a sugar bonus for the rationing program.

### **BONUS SUGAR ALLOTMENT IS APPROVED**

*Stamp #7 in war ration books today took on premium value with Receipt of word from Washington by the Ames rationing board that the stamp was worth an extra two pounds of sugar for July 10<sup>th</sup> to August 22 period.*

*Under the original schedule of sugar purchases permitted under rationing, stamp #5 was good for two pounds of sugar from June 20<sup>th</sup> to July 25<sup>th</sup>, #6 for two pounds from July 26<sup>th</sup> to August 22<sup>nd</sup> and #7 for two pounds for the month after August 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

*Now, stamp #7 becomes a bonus coupon good for an extra two pounds by August 22<sup>nd</sup> and #8 will be used for the regular allotment after that date.*

I received a phone call from the ordnance plant at Ankeny late in July. I drove down for an interview. There I learned the correct name was Des Moines Ordnance Plant, and was abbreviated "DMOP." At the end of the brief interview, I was offered a job as a bullet packer at 75 cents an hour. I accepted gladly.

On Monday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, I returned to commence work at the plant, parking old Jesse on the gravel lot just east of red brick building number four. Arriving a few minutes before eight o'clock that morning, I walked from the car to the guard gate carrying my lunch in a brown paper bag. I got in line behind others waiting at the gate. I moved up fast and soon stood before a guard wearing a two-tone blue uniform.

"Good morning," said the guard politely.

"Good morning, sir." I replied.

"Your lunch in the bag?"



"Yes," I answered, raising the lunch sack so he could see. The guard pulled the top of the paper bag open and looked inside.

"I am to report to Mr. Burns in building four."

"Building four's right behind me here," said the guard, pointing over his right shoulder with his thumb.

"Mr. Burns' office is just to your left down the hall. They'll issue you a badge with a number. Wear that badge where it can be seen at all times. When you check in and out at the gate here, you'll show your badge."

"Thank-you," I said.

The guard turned his attention to the person behind me. I walked briskly to the flat concrete porch, reached the brass door handle and opened the heavy wood door. Inside the ceilings were very high, with glass skylights, open for ventilation. Huge electric fans rested upon high 2" x 4" frames on which woven wire fencing was attached, forming work area dividers.

I turned left and walked to a large fenced enclosure and through its entryway. A stocky middle-aged man with sparse dark brown hair and blue eyes stood at a wooden desk in the center of the enclosed area. He wore a white shirt and tie, stood about 5' 8," weighing approximately 170 pounds.

Toward the back of the office area stood a short dark haired middle-aged lady wearing a navy blue dress. She carried a yellow pencil above her right ear and was going through folders of a filing cabinet drawer. I addressed the man at the desk.

"I'm looking for Mr. Burns."

"I'm Burns," said the man, picking up a clipboard from the desktop in front of him. "Your name?"

"Clark . . . Bob Clark."

"Bob, huh?" asked Mr. Burns. "I have a Robert J. 'J only' it says here."

"That's me. It's just a middle initial . . . no name."

"We have another Bob in our division. Bob Kronkite . . . forklift operator. Did they tell you in personnel we work seven days a week?"

"Yes," I said.

"I need workers who show up every day - on time."

"Sure," I said. "I understand that."

"I need to see your social security card."

I reached into my right rear pants pocket, removed my billfold, opened it, selected the social security card and handed it to Mr. Burns. He checked the number against his clipboard list and handed the card back to me. I replaced the card in the billfold and slid the billfold back into my pants pocket. Mr. Burns handed me my badge.

"Your badge number there . . . 181 . . . it corresponds to your time card number. Wear the badge up on you shirt where it can be seen at all times. You have to show your badge to the guards at the gate both coming in and going out. Your section manager here will show you how to use the time clock."

I pinned the badge above the pocket on the upper left side of my shirt.



"Jessie," called Mr. Burns.

The middle-aged lady looked up, closed the file cabinet drawer and stepped over to the desk.

"Jessie, this is Bob, a new packer. He'll be working for you and Millie"

The phone rang. "Excuse me," said Mr. Burns, reaching the telephone on his desk. "Burns."

"I'm Jessie," said the pleasant appearing lady, extending her hand.

I shook her hand briefly.

"Oh," said Jessie, looking at my badge. "You're Robert J. only. No middle name?"

"No, just the initial. I go by 'Bob'."

"Where are you from, Bob?" Jessie asked.

"Ames – well outside Ames, really. We live on a farm northwest of town." I walked along with Jessie to the time clock on the west side of the hallway. She removed a card from the rack, lifted the pencil from her ear, jotted my name and number 181 on the time card and handed it to me.

"You'll use this temporary card your first week. Starting next week your name and employee number will be printed right here at the top of the card."

"Now, shove your card in the slot there . . . right above the clock."

She handed me the card. I grasped it with both hands and slipped the edge into the slot. A clanging mechanical noise and thud were heard as the clock recorded the date and time onto the card. I took it out again.

"Now these cards are placed over here in alphabetical order."

Millie reached for the card, placing it in the metal rack to the right of the time clock.

"That's where you'll find it when it's time to clock out. Now, follow me."

Jessie walked a few feet north alongside a high woven wire divider, turning left at the corner. I followed her through an opening leading to a series of south-to-north moving waist-high metal roller conveyors.

We walked up to a young lady in tan coveralls leaning over instructing a girl sitting at a conveyor loading bullets into pasteboard cartons. The lady in coveralls straightened up and looked at Jessie.

"Millie," said Jessie, "meet Bob."

"Hi, Bob," said Millie, grabbing my right hand and shaking it briskly.

"Millie's my assistant. Her directions are the same as those coming directly from me. Always do as she tells you."

"Yes, ma'am," I said with a smile.

Millie, slightly taller than me, had black medium length hair and soft grayish eyes. Her face resembled that of my Idaho cousin, Lois.

"He's all yours," said Jessie who turned and headed back to Mr. Burns' office.

"Okay, Bob," Millie said, "come with me. I want you to meet Paul Young. He's new, too. Paul can help you get started."

Millie led me back toward the opening Jessie and I had entered. We walked past the south end of a waist-high north-to-south moving conveyor



carrying pasteboard cartons of .50 calibre bullets. We turned north and walked a few steps, stopping near an overhead conveyor moving west-to-east with dangling steel hooks on which tin-lined empty wood boxes hung. The boxes were painted yellow with black lettering.

"Paul," Millie said, "can you stop a minute?"

"Cow's ass?" Paul quipped. "Oh, it's you. Millie!"

"I knew Paul's question was his humorous substitution for 'How's that?'"

"Now, you stop that!" she said. "You'll embarrass Bob."

"Yes," I came back, "I'm very sensitive."

Millie laughed. A trace of a smile came across Paul's face as he reached across the conveyor to shake my hand.

"I want him to work with you, Paul," Millie said. "Now you train him right!" Millie shook an index finger under Paul's nose and walked away.

Paul Young, blue-eyed with blond hair, was nearly my age, 19. He stood about 5'9" and weighed close to 150 pounds. He had a dry crisp sense of humor, joking and welcoming my quick retorts as I learned to pack loaded shell cartons inside the tin-lined wood boxes.

"What's this 'J only'?" asked Paul, reading from my badge. "Are you related to J. Edgar Hoover?" he asked with a straight face.

"My family was poor," I came back. "Couldn't afford a middle name."

"Yeah," Paul came back. "And people in hell want ice water."

We laughed at each other's humor. I had gained speed in the work and enjoyed the physical activity, grabbing tin-lined wood boxes from the overhead conveyor, setting extras in stacks on the concrete floor beneath the conveyor for use by both Paul and me when there were large gaps in the incoming supply and packing the bullet cartons in the large boxes. When filled, I lifted the wood box onto a second waist-high conveyor, taking the boxes to workers who placed lids on them and screwed wing nuts onto bolts protruding upward from the wooden box edges.

I scanned the area, noticing a number of attractive young ladies at various types of work. One young lady in particular caught my eye. She wore a light green dress and work gloves. Sitting beside a conveyor, she picked up bullets as they moved along, placed ten in each small carton and sent the filled cartons on down the moving conveyor. She had bright blue eyes and long honey colored hair that curled to bounce around her shoulders.

Paul took a brief break. I continued packing, working faster during his absence to keep ahead of the bullet cartons constantly coming toward me on the conveyor. When Paul returned, he congratulated me on passing the test. I hadn't realized I was being tested, but I had managed to keep ahead of the oncoming cartons of bullets, packing every single one in the large wood boxes. And, on my first day, too.

I was once again doing inside work, but it didn't feel like it. The sun's rays penetrated the huge skylights, brightening the inside of the plant. Although big fans accomplished some cooling of the building from the high 2' x 4' plates, we felt the summer heat and humidity.



I took a brief break after Paul returned, hurrying across the hallway east to the water fountain. The young lady in the green dress was drinking from the fountain when I got there. I noticed her pretty light green dress had barely noticeable narrow vertical white stripes, emphasizing an exquisite female form. She finished drinking, straightened to her full five feet, two inches and turned to face me. Her bright blue eyes sparkled. She cast the warmest of smiles.

"This is my first day. Oh . . . I'm Bob Clark," I announced, reaching my security badge. "Number 181!"

"I'm Beverly Barringer," she said, smiling broadly and pointing to her badge. "137."

"Hello," I said, attempting to return the smile.

"Hello."

"Hot one today."

"Yes," she replied, pulling the back of her wrist across her sweaty forehead. "Yes, it is."

"Have you worked here long?"

"Just a few weeks."

"Beverly. Very pretty. Do you have a middle name?"

"Ann."

"Beverly Ann. So musical."

"Thanks, what's your middle name?"

"I don't have one . . . just the initial 'J.'"



**Beverly (early teens) at home in Pleasantville,  
with her favorite pet, Red, a Cocker Spaniel.**



"That's different."

"Where are you from?"

"Pleasantville. Do you know where that is?"

"Pleasantville, No."

"Down past Carlisle . . . southeast of Des Moines."

She turned and walked away.

"Nice to meet you, Bob," she said.

Hearing her speak my name thrilled me. She walked north, down the hall toward the rest rooms. Hadn't this happened before? That low pitched voice – similar to that of a small boy. I was so certain we had talked before.

"Oh, you too!" I called. "I mean . . . I'm glad I met ya!"

In a near trance, I stepped to the water fountain, leaned down and sipped the cool water.

I felt I had seen those sparkling bright blue eyes before. Her warm smile kept swimming through my mind. When and where would I have ever met such a special person? I kept hearing her say, "Beverly" . . . "Beverly Ann." I felt something strange happening to me.

Even the name of her hometown seemed to ring a bell. Perhaps I had heard my parents mention Pleasantville when discussing the old times in the Chariton area southeast of Des Moines.

Back at my station across from Paul, I automatically pulled on the leather gloves to protect my wrists from the soldering acid. I reached a wooden box from the high conveyor at my right, placing it on the stand in front of me, grasped a small box of bullets in each hand from the moving waist-high conveyor and started packing the bullet cartons into the large wooden box.

I kept an eye out for Beverly returning to her workstation. After a few minutes, I saw the attractive young lady in the light green dress, her long honey colored hair curled at the end to bounce around her shoulders.

"Well, Paul . . . I met that little blond," I called.

He turned around, walking backward.

"I met that little blond, I said, nodding in her direction."

"Cow's ass?" he asked, humorously cupping a hand to his ear and tilting his head.

"I ran into that little blond at the water fountain. Very nice!"

"Oh, you've had your eye on that little blond over there, haven't ya?"

"She's really nice," I said.

"Oh, yeah, R. J. Several nice ones around here."

Being addressed by my initials was new to me. At 4 o'clock I followed Paul through the line at the time clock. I watched how he clocked out, located my time card and followed suit.

I rushed home to work on the car for the trip to work the next morning. Before starting on the car I just had to tell Mom about meeting Beverly. As usual Mom was overwhelmed with work and the incessant demands of little kids. I jumped in the first chance I got.

"Mom, I met a cute little blond at the plant. She's from Pleasantville."



"Pleasantville?" Mom questioned. "Pleasantville's down there north of Chariton."

"Her name is Beverly," I said.

"Do you know her last name?"

"Barringer."

"Barringer," Mom repeated, contemplating. "Not familiar."

Mom continued with her work. I walked out the front door and over to the concrete slab just north of the house where the pump stood. Several attempts had been made to use a gas motor with belts for pumping water from the well beneath. The attempts at this "convenience" finally ended. We continued pumping water by hand.

Segments of old pulley belts were strewn on the concrete slab near the pump. I picked up a belt strip and carried it about 50 feet south to the box elder tree across the gravel driveway east of the front porch, also formed of concrete. I dropped the belt on the grass, started Jessie and pulled her around to the east side of the tree so I could lie on the grass under the car.

I opened the trunk on back of the car. It was shaped like a big suitcase with a flat lid and straps to hold it down. I removed a pair of snips, pliers and an ice pick. I dropped the snips and pick on the grass near the belt and hurried with the pliers to the barn about 100 yards north for a piece of bailing wire. Returning to the car, I picked up the belt and snips, cutting the belt into four foot-long segments then punched holes in the belt segments with the ice pick. I jacked up the right rear of the car and removed the wheel, exposing the brake shoes. I grabbed the pliers and belt segments, my new "brake pads," and crawled under the car.

With the pliers I unwound the wire holding the two worn brake linings and removed them from the brake shoes. I threaded the rusty bailing wire through the newly punched belt holes. With the pliers I tightened the wire, repeating the procedure with the left rear wheel. My hands were covered with rust from the old bailing wire and black grease from the old brake shoe metal, but I had new brake pads.

I hurried to the lumber pile just southwest of the barn. Various types of old lumber had to be handled with care to avoid splinters and nails. In earlier days, when barefooted, I had stepped on rusty nails protruding from lumber in that pile. I thought of those painful moments as I tossed lumber aside in my search for a small piece of galvanized sheet metal. I needed the metal to cover the hole I had noticed in the muffler while under old Jessie. I located one of the size needed.

On my way back to the car with the metal piece, I stopped at the garage under the southeast corner of the house. There, I located a small roll of asbestos paper, ripped off a short piece and returned to the car with the asbestos and sheet metal. I picked up the snips from the grass and cut the asbestos to fit around the muffler, between the ridges at each end.

With the pliers, I cut off three lengths of bailing wire and placed the asbestos, sheet metal, wire and pliers beneath the back bumper, then crept



under the car, again lying on the grass looking up at the bad muffler. I wrapped the asbestos fabric around the muffler, rust hole and all, then reached for the piece of flat metal, wrapping it over the asbestos insulator and pressed it around the ailing muffler, then reached for a strand of bailing wire, threading it up over the sheet metal. When I had wrapped the wire around the covered muffler three times, I took the pliers and twisted it to tighten the wire around the metal then reached another length of the wire, repeating this procedure until the muffler covering was wired in three places. I tightened the insulation and metal covering by twisting the three strands of wire with the pliers.

It was nearly dark when I started the car to test the muffler and brakes. The car ran much quieter and the brakes were much more firm than before.

Bruce borrowed old Jessie to go out with his buddies one evening. After his night out, I checked old Jessie to learn the lug nuts had pulled through the right rear wheel, enlarging two of the holes. I knew it would have taken some hard driving to pull lug nuts through those steel wheels. Certain I was fortunate to have gotten the car back with no further damage, I told Bruce not to worry about the wheel, since I intended to buy 16-inch wheels and tires, so I would be getting rid of the 19" disk wheels anyway.

To get by until then I removed the lug nuts, scared up a number of large washers and placed them around the bolts. When the lug nuts were tightened onto the bolts against the washers, the wheel was held firmly.

I performed all the car repairing I could accomplish without expense. Some items took money I had planned for paying Mom back. I wanted to get a radio and sixteen-inch wheels and tires for Old Jessie. Sixteen-inch tires were more readily available than the obsolete nineteen-inch during wartime rationing. Although cars of that vintage were made with no radios, people did find ways to install them. With \$36 coming in each week from the ordnance plant job I felt confident I would reach all my financial goals.

I looked forward to each day's work at the ordnance plant and enjoyed driving old Jessie along the gravel road short cut I had discovered directly south of our farm to the west plant entrance. Dust billowed behind, as I drove along beside expansive fields of green corn, alfalfa and soybeans. During those warm summer days, I kept Jessie's windows open and could hear the cheerful singing of wild birds perched on fences and telephone lines. Those mornings reminded me of the meaning behind the state's name. Iowa was derived from the Indian word for "beautiful land."

I happily opened my brown lunch sacks so the ordnance plant gate guards could see inside each morning. I walked briskly to the front door of building four, anticipating seeing newfound friends. My special thrill was in hearing Beverly's morning greeting.

I realized the war brought on the rare moments I was experiencing and wondered why I was allowed to enjoy life in a world of turmoil, death, maiming and destruction. I was also fully aware many of us would soon be headed into combat.



Paul Young had decided not to use the bulky gloves. He simply buttoned down the cuffs of long shirtsleeves. I followed suit, packing bullets with bare hands. Without the gloves the long metal screws extending upward from the top edges of the large wood boxes wore the cuffs, often ripping through and scratching our wrists. Our inner wrists and arms came into contact with soldering acid, remaining from soldering the metal liners of the wood boxes. The inner wrist areas were constantly irritated, causing them to burn and turn a brownish color.

I often glanced over at Beverly. When we made eye contact across the conveyor area, we smiled at each other. I often tore a piece of a discarded cardboard carton and wrote a note on it, asking her to meet me at the water fountain.

Paul and I, always suffering a degree of inner wrist acid burning, ignored the discomfort and concentrated on humor. Popular in those days were the radio comedy shows.

"Remember this one?" Paul asked. "Hello, Hope!"

"Oh, sure. The guy with the black mustache on Bob Hope's show. Now, what's his name? Uh . . . Jerry Kalona!"

"Hope's phone rang," Paul went on. "Bob answers. 'Hello . . . Kalona, where are you?' Kalona says, 'Riding down Hollywood Boulevard in an automobile'. Hope came back, 'Kalona, you can't be riding in an automobile. Cars don't have telephones.' 'Okay, I'll hang up'."

I laughed, then I acted out a brief episode between Bob Hope and Jerry Kalona, I recalled from the popular radio comedy.

"Kalona called in. 'Hello, Hope,' I said, imitating Kalona's voice. "Bob asked, 'Kalona, where are you?' 'I'm standing here on the corner of Fifth and Main.' 'Why are you standing on the corner of Fifth and Main?' 'I'm holding up a building.' 'A man can't hold up a building, Kalona.' 'Okay'. Then ya hear a big crash." Our laughter attracted the attention of other workers.

Millie stopped by with a small piece of a bullet carton, slipped it into my hand and left. I quickly unfolded it and read.

"I'll meet you at the water fountain at ten fifteen. Beverly."

Feeling a warm rush inside, I caught Beverly's eye and signaled her an okay. I kept wondering where I could have seen her before.

Paul's "Hello, Hope" greetings had become mixed with "R. J." He had a comic way of drawing out the "R." Others had commenced calling me "R. J." as well. Sally even referred to me as "J. only," as it appeared on my badge.

Millie walked over to check the wood boxes Paul and I had sent down the metal conveyor rollers, making certain all had been packed correctly for the next step, placing of the lids onto the wood boxes. Wing nuts were screwed down onto the upright machine screws we constantly avoided our wrists striking, holding the wood lid on tightly.

Millie smiled as she walked back past us, indicating her approval of our work. When she had departed Paul leaned over the box he was loading to be heard over the constant factory noises.



"We must keep up on our poetry," he said in somber deadpan.

"Yes, sir!"

"Words to live by," Paul continued. "The mountaineers, they have no fears. They live in caves and ditches. They fuck their wives with butcher knives, the dirty sonsabitches. They beat their cocks with big hard rocks, but these are only trifles. They hang their balls upon the walls and shoot them down with rifles."

I doubled over with laughter.

"I've gotta learn that one!" I managed through my laughter.

Paul had told so many "Hope-Kalona" jokes he had gained the nickname, "Hope," in our section.

When either Paul or I went to lunch, one of the other packers took over for us. Both were near our age. Dick Fargo was fairly slim, about 5' 9" tall, weighing about 150 pounds. Dick had dark reddish hair and green eyes. Russell Middlekauf had a rather round face, wore a tiny mustache, with dark hair, bluish-green eyes, stood 5' 7," and weighed around 140 pounds. Russ had enlisted in the army and was awaiting the call to active duty.

I covered the packing for both of us when Paul took a break. He did the same for me. I saw Beverly get up from her seat and remove her gloves.

"Can ya run things here a minute?" I asked Paul. "I need to get a drink."

"I'm just learning," Paul quipped, "but I'll try."

He pulled extra wood boxes off the high conveyor and stacked them on the floor, enabling him to stay ahead of the oncoming cartons of bullets while I was away.

When I reached the water fountain it was in use by none other than Beverly Barringer. She wore salmon colored coveralls, slightly soiled by the oily film from the from the .50 calibre bullets she packed.

"Hi, Beverly!"

Finished drinking, Beverly turned around, wiping sweat beads from her forehead with the back of her wrist.

"Hi, Bob," said Beverly, smiling warmly. "Or is it 'R. J.'? I sure get thirsty in this heat.

"It's gettin' hot alright."

I stepped over to the fountain and took a couple quick sips of lukewarm water.

"You're from Ames?" Beverly asked.

"Well," I replied, turning to face her, "we actually live on a small farm a few miles northwest of Ames. I graduated from Ames High last year."

"I've been to Ames. Two of the girls I work with live there," Beverly said.

"Oh, really? Which ones?"

"Edythe Danielson," she said, nodding toward the conveyor she had left.





"The dark haired girl with her back to us."

"That's Edythe," I said. "I'm not too good at rememberin' names."

"Edythe's really from Decorah, but she's staying with her sister in Ames. And, June, the taller blond."

"Now, I've seen her before. June, huh? Yeah, and the last name's Olson or Johnson? One of those Scandihuvian names?"

"I'm not sure," Beverly confessed

"What do you guys do over there?"

"Right now I'm screening. Clara and I are printing letters on the boxes."

"On the wood boxes?"

"Yes. Black lettering over the yellow paint. Do you know Clara?"

"No."

"She's the one sitting at the screener now."

"Oh, with the long Brunette hair?"

"Mm-hmm."

Beverly glanced down at the front of her coveralls, swiping a hand across the soiled area, made more prominent by well-developed breasts.

"It's not the cleanest work in the world. But, I don't do too well packing shells. We do what has to be done. There's a war on."

"I told my mother you're from Pleasantville," I said. "She knows where it is. My folks used to live at Chariton."

"That's not too far from Pleasantville. Right now I'm staying in Ankeny with Reverend Shepard and his wife. They're good friends of my aunt and uncle. He's the Methodist minister here in Ankeny." Following a short pause, she asked, "How do you like your work by now?"

"It's okay. Gets tiresome standin' all day, but *there's a war on*."

She laughed at my repeating the popular expression she had used. Her sparkling blue eyes and ready smile radiated such warmth.

"We have a good time, though," I continued.

"You seem to. Every time I look over there you guys are laughing."

"Paul and I exchange jokes we remember from the Bob Hope radio show."

"Oh, that's why Millie calls him 'Hope'."

"Yeah. I guess everybody does. Paul's pretty funny. Have you heard his Kalona imitation?"

"Who?"

"Jerry Kalona . . . on Bob Hope's radio show. He's always out somewhere phoning in to Bob. 'Hello, Hope!' he says. Paul does good Kalona imitations."

"I think I know who you mean. The radio character. Yes, he's very funny. I'm about out of time. I have to make a stop down this way," she said, pointing down the hall.

"See ya, Beverly."

She walked quickly north, down the hallway, toward the ladies room. I took a quick drink from the water fountain and went back to my packing



station, mentally rehashing our brief water fountain discussion. In the future, I would avoid such high praise of Paul's humor.

I really looked forward to my first payday. First among my obligations was paying Mom back the remainder of her loan for buying the car. I also needed clothes and wanted to get a new radio for the family and one for ole Jessie. I soon realized I needed a number of paydays.

On my way home I stopped by Fall Inn. Bill Valline had gone to work there, pumping gas and doing vehicle repairing. He repaired lots of tires. I looked at the discarded tires behind the building that housed the restaurant and repair shop. There were no 19" tires. So, I priced used vulcanized 16" tires. The vulcanized tires would not fit my rims but would fit 16" rims. Buying 16" tires meant I must first buy 16" wheels. Vulcanized tires would be much safer than the worn 19" tires. Until I could afford the vulcanized 16" tires, Bill and Pete Sherman, the garage manager, promised to keep an eye out for used 19" tires. Working at the plant entitled me to a "C" windshield sticker making me eligible to buy additional gas for driving to work and back plus retread tires.

At work, Beverly and I continued to exchange notes, delivered primarily by Millie and Jessie. I wanted to ask Beverly for a date. Rumors were rampant about some of us starting to work a night shift, commencing at 4:00 p.m. and ending at midnight. No one knew who would be assigned to that shift. I feared I would end up on a different shift from Beverly. I wanted to go out with her before we found ourselves working different shifts. I sent her a note asking her to go to dinner the next Saturday night.

One of the most popular newspaper comic strips of the day was "Lil' Abner." Among the "Lil' Abner" characters was a hillbilly woman called "Available Jones." Her profession involved bringing young couples together romantically.

Millie had strongly hinted that I ask Beverly for a date and continued encouraging her to go out with me, efforts that brought her the nicknames "Available" and "Jones."

Until I could afford better tires, I let old Jessie set at home. I rode to and from the plant with Mrs. Fry, a lady who lived in the town of Ontario, south of our farm. George, oldest of the two Fry boys, was in my grade at Ontario School and in high school at Ames. The younger boy, Arthur, had a crush on my sister, Pat, and often visited our place. He went on to gain fame for developing "Post-Its" at 3M in Minneapolis.

Our section was scheduled to commence working the swing shift on Monday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>. I would no longer be able to ride with Mrs. Fry, who continued to work the day shift. The last day I rode with her, we listened to her car radio. On the way home late that Friday afternoon, "Today's Music," a program featuring the popular big band music, came on WOI, the Iowa State College radio station. I couldn't get Beverly off my mind. I told Mrs. Fry I met a very special young lady at work and had already asked her for a date.



She stopped her '32 4-door Chevy at Campus Town to pick up some clothing from the dry cleaners. She left the radio playing. I waited in the car. Glenn Miller's rousing "American Patrol" commenced to play. I turned up the volume, stomped my feet and snapped my fingers in rhythm with the music. When the song ended, I turned the volume down. Mrs. Fry returned to the car and placed the clothes in the back seat. She got in behind the steering wheel, pulled away from the curb and drove past the theaters and on west toward Ontario.

"I sure hope that little blond says she'll go out with me next Saturday night!" I said, almost to myself.

"Don't worry," said Mrs. Fry confidently. "She will."

I wondered how she could be so sure, not even knowing Beverly.

On Monday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, I started work at 4:00 p.m., instead of the customary 8:00 a.m. I was so pleased that all of the people in our station would continue working together.

I met Beverly at the water fountain that first night.

"Oh, just so you know," she said. "That's Edythe - working over there with me tonight. She's 18. I'm 19."

"I'm 19, too."

"I'll be 20 in September."

"I won't be 20 'til next February."

"Then I'm older than you," Beverly said with a chuckle. "Edythe lives at Ames, you know. She asked me to visit her and stay overnight."

"Beverly, you're always welcome to ride up there with me. I wanna introduce ya to another 'Jessie,' anyway. That's what I call my '29 Chevy."

"Thank you, R. J., for the offer," Beverly said with that familiar smile. "That's real nice of you. I'll see you later."

As she walked down the hall toward the rest room, I remained on pins and needles. When would she give me an answer about going to dinner Saturday night? Maybe she's just letting me down easy, I thought.

We continued to receive disappointing war news. The Ames Tribune of August 6<sup>th</sup> carried this headline:

### **STALINGRAD FACES DANGER ON 2 SIDES**

*Stalingrad, the Pittsburgh of Russia, was threatened today by a German pincer from two sides and Nazi forces penetrated deeper into the Caucasus against what appeared to be a weaker Soviet resistance.*

*Superiority of the German air force - masses of dive bombers, level bombers and fighters - which is cooperating closely with German tank and infantry forces was said by a Red air force commander to be a major factor in breaking the Russian lines."*

This report appeared on the Ames Tribune front page, August 6<sup>th</sup>:

### **GANDHI'S REVOLT IS NEAR**

*Bombay, India (UP) Widespread violence among India's masses was predicted today when nationalist leaders, meeting here with Mohandi*



*K. Gandhi, abandoned virtually all hopes of last minute compromise averting a nationwide civil disobedience campaign against British rule.*

Another article bore this headline:

**CO-ORDINATED SUB AND BOMBER CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
ICELAND IS STARTED BY FORCES OF GERMANY**

*Reykjavik, Iceland (UP) The Germans have opened a co-ordinated submarine and bomber campaign around Iceland, perhaps because of increasingly effective U-boat measures off the Atlantic coast of the United States. Twice this week, German bombers attacked military installations in Iceland.*

The war news was bewildering. It was impossible keeping up with unfamiliar names of far-flung places and comprehending the magnitude of the spreading worldwide conflict. We were immersed in helping in the war effort, adjusting to wartime governmental regulations and tackling the normal obstacles of our changing lives.

I was quite aware of the embarrassment I would have to endure if Beverly turned me down for the dinner date. All our ordnance plant friends were aware I had asked her. I felt they were also awaiting her answer. Adding to public exposure of the matter was Millie's constant "Available Jones" urging Beverly to accept.

Friday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, it was nearly 4:00 p.m. when I rushed to the end of the time clock line. Beverly was ahead of me, talking with several of her girl friends. She glanced back to see I was in line. We greeted each other. She turned back and continued talking to her friends, clocked in and walked with the girls to her seat beside the conveyor. I clocked in and joined Paul at our workstation. He commenced the evening's work by telling a new joke. I got past my anxiety by faking calmness.

The evening drifted into night. I hadn't received a single note from Beverly. I prepared myself for the worst, occasionally exchanging glances with her across the conveyors. Finally, Beverly signaled me she was about to take her break.

"Water fountain time," I announced.

"Go ahead," Paul said as if fully understanding the moment. "I'll handle it."

I quickly removed a few wood boxes from the high conveyor and piled them on the floor for Paul to use while I was away, then casually strolled past the waist-high conveyor and across the hall to the water fountain. Beverly arrived at the fountain ahead of me. She leaned down and took a brief sip from the fountain. When she finished, I stepped over to the fountain, leaned down and drank the lukewarm water.

"I've decided to go to dinner with you tomorrow night," she said softly.

"Oh, good!" I said, finishing drinking.

I straightened up and faced Beverly. We automatically started walking down the hall.



I'll bring a change of clothes," she said.

"Me too."

"I have to tell Mrs. Shepard in the morning."

I looked over at her as we walked, not really understanding who she meant.

"The lady where I'm staying. It'll be early in the morning when I get home."

I remembered Beverly had mentioned staying at the Methodist minister's home in Ankeny.

"Oh sure," I said. "Normal people on normal hours."

"How do you like the swing shift by now?" she asked.

"I like it. How about you?"

"Oh, I like it fine. I really like having mornings free."

"Me too. For one thing, I can work on ole Jessie."

"Oh . . . your car," she recalled. "We wouldn't want to get the two Jessies mixed up. Jessie and Millie really get a kick out of your funny notes."

"Oh, do they actually get to read 'em?"

"Some of them are so funny I just have to share them."

"I really enjoy yours. I hope our bosses don't get tired carrying our mail."

"I think they kinda like it."

We had reached the rest room entrances.

"I'll see you later, R. J."

She entered the ladie's room. I went into the men's room and heaved a sigh of relief. I had to tell Paul my good news so I hurried back to work.

"Beverly's going out with me tomorrow night!" I quickly told Paul just as Millie approached, extending her hand, palm up.

"I came to collect my fee," she said, referring to her services in promoting the romance between Beverly and me.

"You do good work, Available." I said.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a penny, placing it in her hand.

"No charge," she said, handing the penny back to me. "You two have a good time."

"Thanks, Jones. I'm sure we will. And thanks for all your help."

Millie walked away, passing Jessie on her way over to have a word.

"Now, young man," Jessie preached as she waved her right index finger back and forth before my eyes. "You treat Beverly nice. She's a very special young lady."

"I think so, too, Jessie. I promise to be on my best behavior!"

"You'd better be."

"They're taking me along, Jessie," Paul quipped, "to chaperone."

"Oh, you'd be a big help!" Jessie said vehemently.

Paul and I laughed. She walked away smiling and shaking her head.

Saturday morning, August 8<sup>th</sup>, I glanced at the Ames paper resting on a dining room chair near the door. It read, "James C. Petrillo, president of the American Federation of Musicians, still says his union's members can't make



any more records for radio, jukeboxes and other public use despite a request by Elmer Davis of OWI to withdraw the ban as a 'Patriotic Duty'."

This headline caught my eye:

### **SIX SABATEURS ARE EXECUTED**

#### **Intense activity at Jail Indicates their Fate is Near**

*Washington (UP) Six Nazi saboteurs were executed today the white house announced. The six were executed at the District of Columbia jail, the white house said. A seventh, Ernest Peter Burger, was sentenced to hard labor for life, the eighth, George John Dasch, was sentenced to 30 years hard labor.*

Another story commenced with this headline:

### **DESTRUCTION OF SOVIET OIL FIELDS STARTED AS NAZIS ADVANCE**

*The German war machine surged upon Russia's Maikop oil fields today and it was indication that the embattled red army, falling back to the foothills of the Caucasus mountain range, already was destroying the Maikop installations in a scorched earth retreat.*

I dropped the newspaper and went outside. It was a bright sunny morning, a good time to clean old Jessie inside and out. At midnight my big date was to take place. With a whiskbroom and dustpan, I cleaned the floor. I made sure the brake pads were wired tightly and that I had a couple spare tires - patched with boots inside the tire casings. I hung a clean shirt and pair of pants in the car.

At midnight, Beverly was just ahead of me in line for clocking out. First, time card number 137 clocked out, then number 181. We took our dress clothes into the rest rooms to change, placing our work clothes into paper sacks.

The guard at the gate thoroughly examined the clothing bags before allowing us to pass. Beverly and I walked across the gravel parking lot to the car in the dim bluish glow of the parking lot lights.

"Beverly, this is Jessie!"

"Hello, Jessie. At last we meet."

I opened the right front door. Beverly stepped up and into old Jessie. I gently closed the door, thrilled at actually having reached this magic moment.

As I drove the twenty miles to Scotty's restaurant, just west of Campus Town on Lincoln Way, Beverly and I talked and laughed about all the commotion leading up to our date. At the restaurant we sat facing each other and ordered chicken dinners.

This is Beverly's diary notation of that early morning event:

*My first date other than George. I talked it over with Mrs. Shepard & we decided I was just too young to stick to one fellow. I needed someone who laughed, jokes a lot. George is so serious, partly my fault I know. So, after work I had a chicken dinner with Bob & some*



*of his friends. Certainly had a good time. He is one swell fellow. Silly as he looks.*

Beverly's mention of my friends referred to picking up Bob De Hoet and Bill Valline at Fall Inn after we ate. She later mentioned she was pleased that on our first date I ate the pieces of chicken with my fingers rather than toying with a knife and fork. She politely awaited my lead and followed suit.

The "George" referred to in Beverly's diary was George Wright, a red headed young man. His dad owned Wright Chevrolet of Carlisle, a dealership thriving there today.



**George Wright**

One reason I stopped for Bob and Bill was so I could be alone in the back seat with Beverly. Bob drove with Bill in the right front seat, leaving me free in the back seat to demonstrate my affection.

"You missed a hole in the road back there, Bob," Bill remarked sarcastically to the driver.

"You could lose your license for a violation like that," I added.

"Are we still on the road?" Bob questioned his own driving ability.

"You're supposed to drive between the cornfields," Bill goaded.

"I'm just learnin', Beverly," Bob quipped. "I hope you feel safe."

"Well, I don't know now," said Beverly, laughing and joining the ribbing.

I put my arm around her and pulled her toward me for a kiss. She skillfully maneuvered away. I waited until the humorous banter in the front seat reached a high point and tried again. Once more, she out-maneuvered me. I remembered Millie's warning and refrained from any further attempts. We continued to laugh and joke with Bob and Bill all the way to the north limits of Ankeny.

"Where do we turn?" Bob asked Beverly.

"First Street," she answered, leaning forward to give directions. "Then I know where I am."

The First Street sign came up.

"Turn right here," Beverly directed.

Bob followed her directions, turning off the paved highway onto the gravel streets of Ankeny. He pulled old Jessie over to the right side and stopped directly in front of the Shepard residence. I opened the right rear door, stepped out of the car and extended my right hand. Beverly clasped it with her left and stepped down. I closed the car door. We walked up the narrow sidewalk, climbed the steps and stepped quietly across the wood porch to avoid awakening Reverend and Mrs. Shepard. Beverly stopped a few feet from the front door and turned to face me.

"I had a real good time, R. J.," she said softly.

"I hope so," I said in hushed tones, "I know I did."

"Your friends are a lot of fun."

"They're nuts. Thanks God I'm normal."



She muffled a laugh. I pressed my hands to her back, pulled her close, leaned down and kissed her just briefly.

"Doggone you," she said softly as if I had done something sneaky.

She stepped toward the door. I slid my hands along her back once more, pulling her close. I leaned down and kissed her again, holding it until her forearms pressed against my chest.

"Doggone you," she repeated.

My arms were still around her. Her hands slid up and over my shoulders. Again, I pulled her close and pressed my lips to hers, thrilling at the touch of her soft warm lips.

"Doggone you!"

"That's the third time you've said that."

"I've got to go in," she whispered.

She reached for the screen door handle. I relieved her of it, pulling the door open. She turned the inside doorknob.

"I'll see you later today," she whispered through the screen.

Beverly went inside, closing the inner door. I allowed the screen door spring to close the door slowly and quietly. I stepped quickly and quietly across the wooden porch, hurried to the driver's side of the car and opened the door. Bill and Bob scooted to the right as I got in behind the steering wheel. The motor was still running. I pressed the clutch pedal down, shoved the gearshift into low, made a U-turn in the gravel street and headed back to Ames.

"Good lookin' little blond there, Bobby." said Bill. "Where'd ya say ya met 'er?"

"Here . . . at the plant where I'm workin'."

"How'd you ever get a date with a snappy lookin' chic like that?" asked Bob

"I tricked her. Told 'er I had a lotta money!"

"Yeah," Bill snickered. "Then take her out in this ole bucket of bolts!"

"Don't let that one get away, buddy!" Bob advised. "She's a gem!"







### CHAPTER 3

Sunday, August 9<sup>th</sup> was another hot humid day. The big fans inside the plant whined away when the shift started at 4:00 p.m. and continued amidst a myriad of factory noises through the night. I smiled across the conveyor belts at Beverly who sat, pulling on a pair of gloves in preparation for eight hours of packing shells. Even though she was surrounded by a number of chattering girls she managed to wave at me one glove at a time. That euphoric warm feeling penetrated my stomach and settled over me. I could still feel those soft warm lips against mine.

I took up my position across from Paul Young. We exchanged our customary Jerry Kalona version of "Hello, Hope!"

Beverly sent me a note mentioning how inquisitive her girl friends were concerning our date early that morning and saying she had gone to church in Des Moines with Mrs. Shepard followed by dinner at Bishop's famous cafeteria in downtown Des Moines.

After work Beverly and I planned on driving to the Highland Park section of Des Moines for an early morning snack at the "Hi Ho Restaurant" on the north side of Euclid Avenue, just east of Sixth Street.

The night moved swiftly. At midnight, I followed Beverly through the time card line.

Grace Dykstra, a shapely black haired young lady from Ames, had asked me for a ride home after work. I asked Grace to join Beverly and me in making the run to the Hi Ho before heading up to Ames. She accepted.

We each ordered a Coke and a sandwich. The Cokes, of course, came in the familiar uniquely curved clear glasses with "Coca-Cola" imprinted in script across the sides. The mixture of syrup and carbonated water with chips of ice were freshly prepared at the soda fountain. In each booth was a jukebox outlet. The three of us occupied a booth and selected big band music for five cents a play.

Grace had ridden in the back seat and was lying down when we reached Reverend Shepard's house in Ankeny. I stopped the car, left the motor running, hurried around the front of the car and opened the right hand door for Beverly.

In no time we were stepping lightly across the wood porch. It was as if time had been turned back twenty-four hours. At the door Beverly turned toward me. Neither of us spoke. I slipped my arms around her and pulled her close. We embraced and kissed.

"I had a good time tonight . . . or . . . this morning," she whispered.



"Yeah . . . morning," I said with a quiet chuckle. "I forget, too."  
 I pulled her close once more, leaned my head against hers.  
 "I'll miss you a few hours," I said.  
 My lips found hers again. We kissed warmly, holding it a long time.  
 "You have a passenger waiting," she said quietly.  
 I opened the screen door. She reached the front door knob.  
 "Good night, Bob."  
 "Good night."  
 She attempted to open the front door. It was locked.  
 "Oh-oh!" Beverly said in a hushed tone. "Locked out!"  
 She knocked on the door. We stood waiting. She knocked again. It took some time for Mrs. Shepard to come to the door. When the door was opened from the inside I hurried across the porch, down the steps and back to the car. By the faint yellowish hues of the distant streetlight I made out Grace asleep in the back seat. I headed old Jessie for Ames.

This is the Sunday August 9<sup>th</sup> excerpt from Beverly's diary:  
*Got up and went to church in Des Moines with Mrs. S. No church here. Had dinner at Bishops.*  
*George called twice in the afternoon and I called him once. Think he ought to buy the telephone company. Had to go through a lot of red tape to get in. Was late. Bob took Grace & myself to the Hi Ho after work.*

I had never bothered to ask Beverly if there were other young men in her life. I was content swimming in a sea of ignorance and had never been happier.

This is what she wrote in her diary for Monday, August 10<sup>th</sup>:  
*Max called, was in Des Moines so that got me up & in a few minutes here came George. Of course, we fought. He always makes up lies about what he's done. May be married to Audrey or has been on a drunk just to make me mad. So kiddish. I wish he'd grow up. After work he was here again - everything went along smoothly.*

The "Max" mentioned in Beverly's diary was Max Collins, Lambda Chi fraternity member at Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa. Max and Beverly had dated when she was a Tri Delt at Simpson. He was the father of writer Max Allen Collins, author of "Road to Perdition," among other works.

As the sun lowered in the western Iowa sky on Tuesday, I entered the front door of building four at the plant. Looking south down the hall I saw a short line at the time clock. Beverly stood near the line of workers. She saw me and got in line. I hurried to get in line behind her. She reached back. We clasped hands briefly as a greeting and moved up to the clock. She reached for card number 137. I pulled card number 181 from the rack. She clocked in and placed her card back in the rack. I slid my card into the time clock slot. It stamped with the customary clang. Beverly walked over to the water



fountain. I put the card back in the rack and joined her. She opened her purse and took out what appeared to be a small piece of paper.

"Here," she said, handing me a 3" x 4" black and white picture of herself.

"Oh, thanks, Beverly!"

I looked down to see that glowing Beverly Ann Barringer smile in a head and shoulders shot. Her beautiful long honey colored hair curled at the end to rest on the white collar of a dark colored blouse.

"That was taken when I was at Simpson," she explained.

"Oh, I'm gonna show this to Mom!"

Beverly pressed her hand against my arm then walked away from me to join the girls near her workstation. I shoved the picture into my shirt pocket.

As I approached my workstation Paul stood talking with Dick Fargo and Russell Middlekauff. The subject concerned our section forming a touch football team.

I was pleased to learn our ordnance plant section would be putting together a touch football team to play evenings once we switched back to the day shift. When Dick asked me to participate I immediately expressed my enthusiasm for the idea. From the early 30s we kids, boys and girls, at school and at home, had played football. We started out playing tackle with no pads. My quickness made me a good blocker and I was confident of my running ability.

The August 11, 1942 Ames Daily Tribune carried this headline:

**CRUCIAL STAGE IN SOLOMONS  
JAPS SEND ALL POWER INTO FIGHT**

Sub headlines read:

**Volunteer Legions Increase German Army Strength  
Rioting, Strikes Continue in Cities of India  
Sternest Measures Promised**

**Red Fleet's Vital Black Sea Bases Being Threatened**

*Moscow (UP) Large volunteer legions from Spain, France and Scandinavia are being thrown into Adolf Hitler's offensive threatening the red fleet's vital Black Sea bases after overwhelming Soviet defenses around the Maikop oil fields, according to the front-line advices today.*

Beverly's diary notation for *Tuesday, August 11<sup>th</sup>*:

*Really had fun. Screened with a girl from Texas. She was the cutest thing we told those crazy moron jokes until we laughed until we cried. Did 2610 boxes too. So I was tired & when I was joyfully walking home thinking of bed - there was George. We had a regular battle of the sexes. He's running it in the ground it won't work out if I see him too much that's all there is to it.*

*Wed., August 12:*



*I've been doing a lot of thinking about George and myself. I'll just have to tell him I don't love him. When I said I did I was sincere. I've never said anything like that unless I really meant it. It'll hurt & hurt me too because I'd said long ago I'd never hurt him. I hope it all comes out in the wash. I guess I first realized the change in my feelings when Grinny was here - blamed it onto being tired.*

"Grinny" was the nickname of Frances Sandegren, one of Beverly's sorority sisters at the Delta Delta Delta house, Simpson College, 20 miles south of Des Moines in the city of Indianola.

After getting off work at midnight, in the early minutes of Thursday morning, Beverly and I drove a couple miles south of the plant in old Jessie to where the .50 calibre tracer bullets were test fired and could be seen streaking across the night sky. Tracers were placed at regular intervals between armor piercing and incendiary bullets in the machine gun belts. Their glow allowed machine gunners a clear view of where bullets were hitting in the dark of night. Testing of the tracers resulted in a full-fledged fireworks display that would start up, illuminate the night sky for several minutes; stop for a few minutes, then repeated the sequence.

After pulling old Jessie off the gravel road, I reached in the back seat for the blanket I always carried. Beverly and I located a level spot on the grass beneath the trees of the pasture. There we spread the blanket and sat down to watch the early morning aerial display.

"I just hated getting Mrs. Shepard up, said Beverly. "She gave me a key."

"Oh, good!" I jabbed. "We can stay out all night!"

Beverly gave off a slight giggle. We settled back on the blanket between bursts of shells.

"Have you always lived in Ames? Or near Ames?"

"I was born there. We moved to the farm when I was nine, because of the depression."

"Since I was six I've lived with my aunt and uncle in Pleasantville," Beverly explained. "My Aunt Fern is my mother's sister. My mother died in 1928. Marilyn, my only sister, is two years younger than me. She lives with another of my mother's sisters in Knoxville. I can't wait for you to meet her. I hope you two like each other."

"Is she as good lookin' as you?"

"Of course! She may start to school at Simpson this fall. I sure hope so."

"You really liked Simpson, didn't you?"

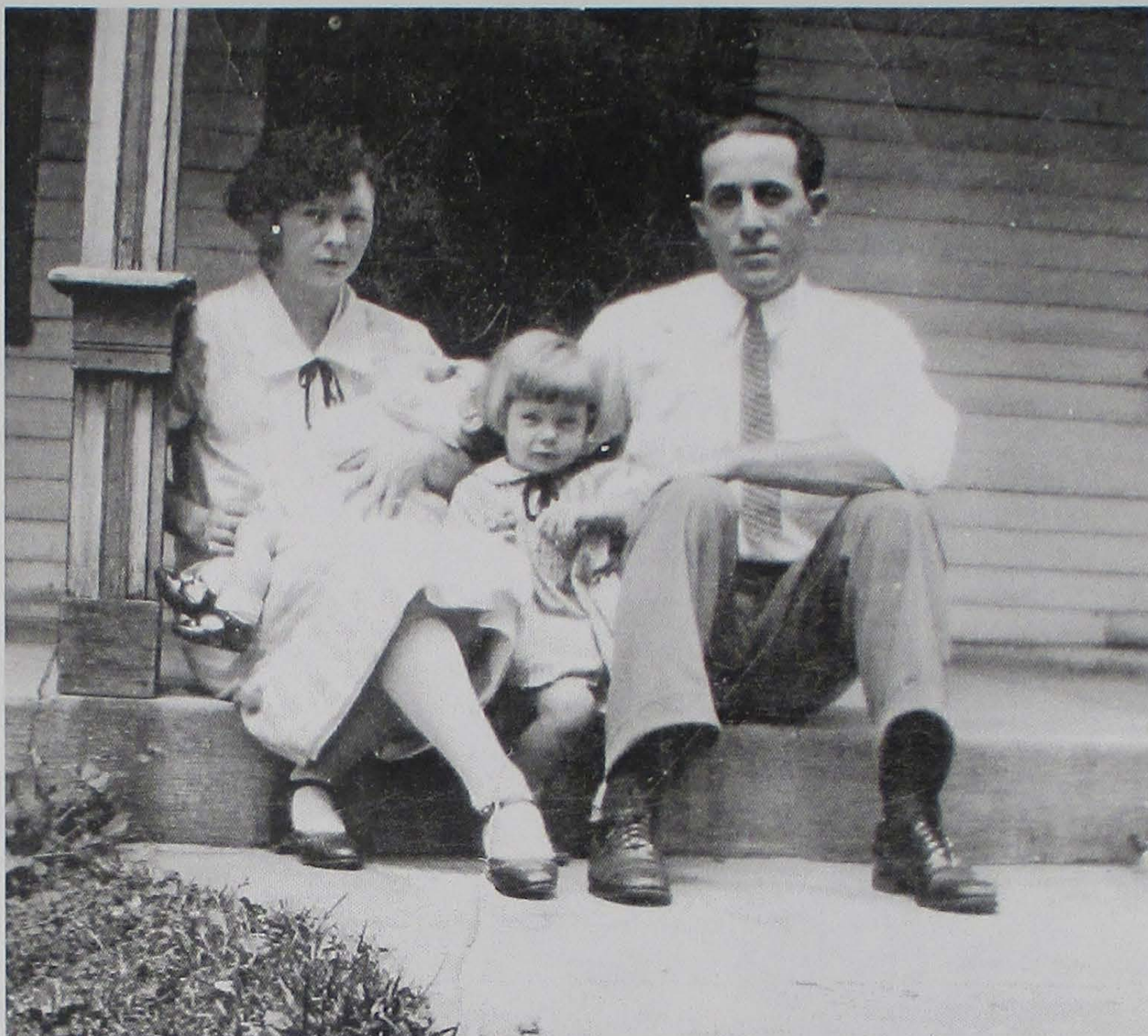
"Oh, yes. I was in the Tri Delt sorority. It was a terrific experience."





**Beverly's mother, Gladys (Galvin) Barringer,  
passed away when Beverly was six years old.**





**Gladys and Preston Barringer with daughter, Beverly.**



**Beverly with her mother**





**Gladys Barringer with her girls, Marilyn and Beverly.**





**Beverly and cousin, Jack**



**Jack, Aunt Fern and Beverly**



"I didn't go to college. I went to work in Omaha right after I got out of high school last year. Then I worked in Chicago. I didn't like the inside work so I came back home. I'm from a big family - second oldest. I have a brother a year older and one a year younger than me. We'll all have to go. You know . . . go to the service. I mean the three of us. I have seven brothers and three sisters altogether. The youngest is a year old. In 1936, my little sister died. She was only seven weeks old."

"Oh, that's so sad. And your poor mother - with all those young ones. What does your dad do?"

"Are you kiddin'?"

Beverly burst into laughter, placing her hand on my arm.

"I love you," she said impulsively. "That quick wit of yours gets me."

"Those sparkling eyes of yours get me!"

"Those are Galvin eyes."

"Galvanize?"

"Yes. Galvin eyes. My mother was a Galvin. The Galvins have the big blue eyes."

"Where's your dad?"

"Well, my dad is with relatives in Adair right now. A ways west of Des Moines. I told you my mother died."

"Yes. You mentioned it."

"She had an appendix operation and came down with pneumonia after that."

"That's awful. And you were only six?"

"Yes. My sister was four. We still miss our mother so very much. I've never told anyone this before . . . but . . . last spring during the Mothers Day weekend, my sorority sisters invited their mothers to a gathering at the house. I was there, too, of course. They were all having such a good time - the girls and their moms. I felt so alone. I just stood and watched, wondering how it would be to have my own mother there."

I heard her slight snuffle and felt her body shake. I pulled her close and held her firmly. After some time the morose mood passed. She stroked the back of my head as we held each other. I pulled back and kissed her briefly.

"Did I tell you?" she continued. "I like the back of your head?"

"The back of my head? Maybe I should start walkin' backwards."

Beverly laughed, pulling my arms tightly around her.

"You nut!" she said, pressing her forearm against my stomach. "And I like your stomach. It's so flat."

The distant machine gunfire commenced again. We rolled back over on our stomachs to witness the yellow-green glow of the tracers streaking across the night sky.

"You never did tell me what kind of work your father does."

"He's a builder. He started out as a carpenter back in 1919 . . . right after he got back from France. He's building a house in Idaho now."



"My dad's a veteran of the first war, too. My Uncle Lloyd is a pharmacist. He owns the drug store in Pleasantville. Bare Drug has been in my uncle's family for over 50 years. I want to invite the gang at work sometime. They'll like the soda fountain."

"I'll have a cherry coke, please."

"Oh, I make the world's best cherry cokes!"

The machine gunfire and tracer show ceased. We relaxed side-by-side on our backs.

"I haven't had a chance to show your picture to Mom."

"Working this shift is sure different. Most people are in bed when we get off. Were we close to your house when we went to dinner?"

"Oh, our place is about half a mile west and another mile and a half north of that restaurant."

"I went to Ames once before," Beverly said, "when I was little . . . to the swimming pool."

"Oh, you did?" I said. "We lived at Carr's Pool one summer, I mean . . . my family. Dad built the bathhouse and concession stands there. Mom operated one of the stands, serving sandwiches and drinks. I was three years old. My brother, Paul, was only two. Mom told me to watch out for him. We were paddlin' around in the water and when I looked for him I couldn't find him. I got out of the water and ran to the snack stand where my mom was and told her I couldn't find Paul. She raced over to the pool and saw him down at the bottom. He had gotten out in the deep end and went under. He was drownin'!"

"Really?"

"Yes! Mom jumped in and pulled him out. She pressed the water out of him and he lived."

"You were a hero!" she joked. "I would've been about three. I wore a yellow and black bathing suit."

I quickly leaned toward her, braced by one elbow.

"Yellow and black?!" I asked emphatically, my thoughts flashing back to the day I met that very special girl at the swimming pool.

"Yellow and black stripes?" I continued. "Horizontal?"

"Well . . . yellow or gold."

"Stripes . . . circular stripes. I mean . . . not up and down, but going around."

"I believe so. But, I was so embarrassed." She chuckled. "My suit had a hole in the crotch."

I sat up abruptly, looking down at Beverly.

"I remember that! I remember! You got back in the water to keep the other kids from noticing!"

"That's right. I did".

"I just could not forget you. That smile . . . the sparkling blue eyes . . . yellow and black striped suit. And then ya had to leave. I didn't want ya to go. I hated it when you left. I thought of you so often after that."



"Maybe I'd remember you but I was so concerned about hiding the hole in my suit."

"When we first met . . . I mean . . . at the water fountain . . . I just knew we'd met before. I just knew it! And that's when it was . . . that long ago. Oh, I'm glad she turned out to be you and you turned out to be her!"

I leaned down and kissed her. We held it a long time.

"My dad is in Adair," she informed me. "Do you know where that is?"

"I've heard of it."

"Well, it's a ways west. I really want to go over and see him. He plans to leave soon. I want to see him before he goes."

"On our day off let's take old Jessie and go."

"Would you, Bob?"

"Sure! I'll have to find a couple spare tires."

"Oh, I'd sure appreciate that!"

*August 14<sup>th</sup>, Friday:*

*I told Bob about my dad and my family & he told me about his. I can talk to him so easy & tell him things I couldn't others. So next Friday he's going to take me to Adair to see my dad.*

*After work George was at the corner. We got along rather nicely - no dim wit lies to make me mad.*

The next day it was hot and humid. I had arranged to pick Beverly up at Rev. Shepard's house in Ankeny. It was a lucky thing I had arrived a little early. My right rear tire was nearly flat. I had to change it immediately, but didn't have a spare with air in it. Beverly waited at Shepard's. Reverend Shepard rode with me to the filling station two blocks east to Highway 69. I had worn a white shirt in case Beverly and I went out after work. I pulled old Jessie to the north side of the filling station on the west side of the highway and stopped near the air hose.

"I know the owner here," said Reverend Shepard.

"That may come in handy," I said. "But, I think I'll only need to borrow the air hose."

The minister stood watching. The bright sun bore down. I rolled up my shirtsleeves and removed a car jack from the car trunk on back of old Jessie. I was trying hard to carry out this dirty mission without soiling my freshly ironed white shirt. I got down on my knees behind the right rear wheel and shoved the jack under the axle, placed the cranking rod into the jack slot and commenced jacking up the car. Just before the tire was ready to lift off the ground I stopped cranking. I straightened up, wiped the perspiration off my forehead with the back of my right wrist, dug into the car trunk for a lug wrench, walked around to the right rear tire, squatted down and removed the lug nuts.

I stood up, stepped to the rear of the car, unwound the bailing wire holding the pack of extra tires on the car trunk and selected the best of the lot. I carried it around and sat it down to lean against the right running



board, returned to the back of the car and wound the wire around the remaining tires to hold them in place.

"It's hard to find tires for the old girl any more," I explained.

"Scarce, are they?" the reverend came back.

"Oh, yeah . . . with the war on. I'm gonna get 16-inch wheels. 16-inch tires are rationed, too, but retreads are available at times."

"And what are these?"

"These are the old 19-inch."

"Yes," he said, "I should think the retreads would be much safer."

Once the lug nuts were loose, I removed the 19-inch wheel and placed it flat on the ground. I went to the car trunk and removed two tire irons. I then pried the rim from the wheel, slid the tire irons between the rim and tire bead, pulling the tire from the rim. I pried the rim ends loose at the seam, leaving the rim to resemble a circular spring with dangerously sharp corners where the two ends met. I pressed the rim ends inward making a smaller circle of the rim, then pulled the old tire and inner tube free of the rim. I opened the right rear car door and pushed the leaky tire inside and closed the door. Then I took the tire leaning against the running board and placed it on the ground near the rim.

I leaned down, picked up the rim and spread my legs to stand over the tire I was mounting. I leaned over, pressing the rim ends together with my hands and slid the rim down inside the tire containing the good inner tube. .

"This is the dangerous part," I explained. "When you're tryin' to lock the rim inside the tire, that rim can spring open. The sharp corners there can rip your hands . . . or spring into your face."

"What can I do to help?"

"Nothing, thanks. It's really a one-man job."

"I've heard about the damage they can do. Be careful there."

"The 16-inch wheels are made in one solid piece. No more clincher rims."

"I should think the 16-inch wheels would be quite an improvement."

"Oh, yes." I said.

I glanced down to see if I had smudged my white shirt. It looked okay, so I leaned down and raised the wheel above the circular rim, pressing it down inside the rim, rotating the wheel left and right until the valve stem protruded through the hole in the wheel. I dropped the wheel and tire to lie flat on the ground and stomped around on the edge of the rim until it snapped into place on the disc wheel. I rolled the wheel over to the air hose on the north wall of the station and commenced filling the mounted tire with air. The minister followed me.

"I can go ask for a tire gauge," Dr. Shepard said.

"No, thanks. I can guess at it. It'll be close enough."

When I thought the tire had enough air in it I rolled the wheel back to the car and mounted it. I reached for the lug nuts lying on the ground and started them one at a time onto the lug bolts. I picked up the lug wrench, tightened each lug nut down snugly and moved to the jack handle behind the



car. I dropped to my knees, cranked the jack handle to the left and lowered the rear of the car until the repaired tire was sitting on the ground. I rose and brushed my hands together.

"She's on!" I exclaimed as I gathered the tools from the ground.

"You must've done all this before," the reverend said with a laugh.

"A few times," I said chuckling.

After placing the tire tools in the trunk, I checked the white shirt for dirt and only found two tiny blotches. I pulled a handkerchief from my left rear pants pocket, wiped them briskly and replaced the handkerchief. I pulled a mechanic's cloth out of the trunk, wiped my hands briefly and headed for the driver's side of old Jessie. The reverend walked to the right front door and got in beside me. We drove back to his house.

"I'll go in and tell Beverly you're ready," said Reverend Shepard.

"Thanks so much."

Dr. Shepard opened the car door and stepped out, turning to extend his right hand. I reached mine across the seat to meet his.

"I'm afraid my hand's kinda dirty," I apologized.

"What's a little dirt? It's from good honest work."

"So glad to have met you, Reverend," I said.

"I'm glad I had this opportunity to meet you, too, Bob," he said sincerely.

The reverend left the right front car door open and hurried up the sidewalk and into the house. I got out and walked around to the right front door. Beverly hurried out of the house and to the car.

"We don't have much time," she warned.

She stepped up and slid onto the front seat. I closed the car door and hurried around to the driver's side and got in behind the steering wheel. In a few minutes we were at the plant time clock. Beverly told me afterward that Dr. Shepard was very impressed with me.

Bud Bates, former kicker on the Ames High football team, worked in another of the ordnance plant buildings. We shared rides when on the same shift.

Beverly had told me about the mean dog next door to the Shepards. It frightened her. When she was a child a dog had attacked her. She bore leg scars all her life left by the dog's fangs. I was exchanging rides with Bud Bates of Ames so I asked Bud to give Beverly a ride home. After work, Bates drove up in front of the Shepard residence in Ankeny. I opened my car door and helped Beverly step down. She feared a chow dog next door so hurried to the front porch and inside. The dog did not appear. Once bud and I were sure she was safely inside we headed for Ames.

After clocking in the next day, Beverly and I separated to go to our individual workstations. Russ Kauffman struck up a conversation across one of the moving conveyors.

"You are one lucky dog, R. J.," said Russ in his familiar high-pitched voice.

"Me?" I asked. "How's that?"



"Of all the girls here," he went on. "Beverly is the one I really wanted to ask for a date. Then you two started going together. You're a lucky dog."

"Thanks, Russ. You have good taste in women."

"She's a real doll," he came back.

"I've sure never known anyone like Beverly!" I said, attempting to convince him I fully appreciated her fine qualities.

Herb Dunn, son of a prominent Des Moines mortuary owner, had recently commenced working in our section. His long, light golden, shiny hair was always combed straight back. "Herbie," as they called him, stood about 5' 8" tall, weighed about 160 plumpish pounds and had blue eyes.

"I wonder if Herbie will follow in his father's footsteps," Paul quipped as we stood opposite each other packing away.

"I wonder," I replied, thinking of the mortuary business.

"You're looking fine . . . ver-ry nat-u-ral," said Paul, presenting his vocal impression of "the friendly undertaker" on the Fibber McGee and Molly radio show.

"Ever notice how much Herbie resembles Bela Lugosi?" Paul asked.

Bela, a motion picture star, had become famous for his portrayal of "Dracula."

I glanced across several conveyors to confirm the likeness, chuckling to myself at the similarity. The unusually long hair, so out of place in those days, made a few of us young guys and gals wonder if he wasn't more likely to date boys than girls. Beverly let me know she did not approve of our "Herbie Humor" and always remained friendly with him.

Diary notes of Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup>:

*Bob asked me to go somewhere. I thought he would since he was all dressed up. I really couldn't since Mrs. Sheperd didn't know about it and besides George might come up.*

*Bob and Bates are bringing me clear home now since a few nights ago a chow dog scared me so. Screened today.*

Sunday morning, Beverly and I attended the Methodist Church at Ankeny. She wore an especially attractive dress with her new pert little hat. I was the proudest person in the place sitting next to her. Reverend Shepard delivered the sermon. I had become acquainted with the minister during our tire changing experience. To me all was well with the world. It was a beautiful sunny Sunday. I drove her home and looked forward to seeing her at work.

*Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup>:*

*George called before I went to work and I had to tell him I was going out tonight.*

*Went back to Ames again, ate and rode around - went clear over to Boone.*

*I like Bob he's so sincere about everything & laughs & I laugh too all the time. I guess he and I have as much fun about as Byron & I did my freshman year."*



*August 17 Mon.:*

*Since Jessie knew Bob & I were out late she put me to packing to rest myself. Bob & Bates took me clear home because of the dog that scares me so & there sat George - sulking with a funny haircut & a funnier hat to cover it.*

*He's such a little kid really. We talked. I told him that I liked him a lot but not loved & actually I never felt so sorry for anyone in my life.*

*A war report on page 7 of the August 18th Ames Daily tribune read:*

**ALL PLANES RETURN SAFELY IN FIRST  
FLYING FORTRESS RAID ON GERMANY**

*August 18 Tues.:*

*Worked on the conveyer. I like it only the day seems so long. Jessey our foreman has invited me home with her some time next week.*

*Betty Mitchell was in our bldg. Selling bonds & went with me to eat my lunch.*

*Bob, Bates & self ate at Good News after work. That Bob - he gets me!*

*I was aware that a short cocky dapper young man named Jackie Mitchell, who worked in another section of the plant, had asked Beverly for a date. She told me she had refused him. I knew Jackie when I saw him. One night he crowded into our clock-out line to be near Beverly. I purposely dropped back in the line in case she preferred talking to him without me around. He moved along at her side loudly persisting she go out with him, emphasizing he drove a Packard automobile. I wondered if his owning a luxury car would make an impression on her. As it turned out she was embarrassed by his brashness before her friends. She handled the situation adroitly.*

*He turned, walking backwards and shouting to Beverly that she would eventually see the light and agree to go out with him. She clocked out and waited at the time clock until I had done the same. She clasped my hand. We walked quickly outside, halting at the gate to be checked by the guard, then hurried across the parking lot to old Jessie, dilapidated as she was.*

*August 19<sup>th</sup> Wed.:*

*Bates day off so Bob brought 'Jessey,' his car. I've grown so attached to that old jalopy. Jackie Mitchell is asking me for a date again. Gee he drives a big Packard & I still won't go. He's too much like Procter & no more. He'd probably make up stories even if he didn't have any grounds to keep Bob from going with me. Bob & I went to Des Moines to eat & had such a good time. He's the craziest, sweetest, nuttiest guy I've ever met.*

*Mrs. Sheperd said George was here.*

*August 20<sup>th</sup> Thurs.:*



Aunt Fern's birthday. We told Eddie we were going to get married.  
(Bob & I)

People believed us. Gosh we were just kidding. Now they're all teasing us.

Van & I had a nice talk. He seems like a dad to me out there. He's 37 but looks older.

No lights on when I got home. Guess they were out all night.

*August 21 Fri.:*

Bob & I went to Adair. We stopped in town first & as I dreaded my dad wasn't there. Nebraska defense working. I felt like crying but Bob snapped me out of it. We then went out to Aunt Dorothy's & ate dinner & looked at pictures. Got back here for our pay & set out again. Had ice cream at Sheperd's. Dinner at Ames, show & then Bowling. Got in early since we both were tired. Tried to crowd so much in one day.

Old Jessie made the trip to Adair without a hitch, purring along like a faithful old dog excited to be part of an important occasion. We had driven a few miles east along Highway 6 after leaving Adair when I glanced over at Beverly.

"I wish we could've gotten there before my dad left," she said sadly.

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I'm so very sorry we missed him."

"It's sure not at all your fault. I thought his letter meant he'd be at Adair a little while yet, but he did say he would be leaving. I just didn't know he meant so soon."

We drove along without speaking. Beverly sat rigidly at the right side of the front seat. She hadn't scooted over to sit close to me as she usually did. I looked over at her. Tears had welled in her eyes.

"I hope we make it to the plant by four o'clock," Beverly said, breaking the long uncomfortable silence.

"She's doin' the speed limit . . . thirty-five," I said. "Look, when we get to the plant . . . I'll keep ole Jessie runnin' in the parkin' lot. You rush inside and grab everybody's checks. Then we'll see how fast ole Jessie'll go."

"She's done real well today. Thanks so much, Bob, for taking me over there."

"Oh, you're sure welcomed. I had a fine time."

I reached her shoulders and pulled her toward me. She slid over to sit close to me. I drove with one arm.

"A young couple drove along like this when a cop stopped 'em. He said, 'Son, you should use both hands.' The young man said, 'Sorry officer, but I need one for drivin'.'"

Beverly chuckled.

"I'm sure glad you have that silly sense of humor," said Beverly, still chuckling.



I remembered her telling me of losing her mother when she was a child and knew how she longed to see her father before he left Iowa. I didn't want my lippy humor to mislead her about my understanding of her hurt feelings.

"I know how disappointed you are," I said, pulling her close.

"Well, one thing . . . my dad's in defense work, too. I'm proud we're all helping President Roosevelt in this war effort. I should tell you . . . I'm a democrat."

"Me too."

"I love you!" she said excitedly, nestling closely.

"My brothers and I were really upset when my dad voted for Hoover. I think he voted right after that, though."

"I'm so glad you're a democrat. I can't wait to vote for the first time."

"Me either! I'll feel so much better with the country in our hands!"

Beverly leaned closer showing her approval of my small bits of humor, no matter how weak. Although I avoided showing it I was surprised by her "I love you" response. It was the second time she had directed those very special three little words to me. Of course, each was a spur of the moment comment. Then, I thought, maybe she just loves all democrats.

After picking up our paychecks at the plant we drove east a mile to Shepard's house in Ankeny. Neither Dr. nor Mrs. Shepard was home. I followed Beverly into the kitchen. She served ice cream. After our late afternoon dessert snack she excused herself and went upstairs to change clothes. I wandered into the living room, spied a radio in the southwest corner, turned it on, tuned to 600 on the AM dial, WOI, Ames, where "Today's Music" featured the best of big band music.

After a few minutes Beverly came downstairs appearing ever so radiant. The soft strains of Glenn Miller's "Sierra Sue" filled the air.

"You look so nice," I said pulling her close to me.

"Well, thank you," she whispered, her hands automatically assuming dancing positions.

We commenced to float across the hardwood floor. She followed my lead so gracefully. I had never felt so much at ease dancing. My cheek had found hers. We glided along as if we were one. The world was far away. Something inside me kept saying, "I'm so deeply in love with you, Beverly Ann." I resisted voicing my true feelings. I wanted nothing to disturb the moment.

The song finished. I bowed deeply.

"Thank you, ma'am."

Beverly quickly curtsied.

"Thank you, kind sir."

I turned off the radio. We walked to old Jessie and were off to Ames for dinner at a restaurant, then to the Collegian Theater for a movie after which we went bowling, then back to Ankeny where I once again kissed Beverly good night at the front door of the Shepard residence.

I drove back to Ames, then on out to the farm, thinking how beautiful my life had become and that the next day, August 22nd, 1942, my cute little



blond brown-eyed sister, Kay, would be five years old. I concentrated on getting the appropriate present for her. That day also marked the sixth birthday of Jacqueline, the sister who died as a baby.

The August 22<sup>nd</sup> front-page headline in the Ames Daily tribune read:

### **BLOODIEST BATTLE IS RAGING**

### **Future of Stalingrad in Balance**

A war report from the Pacific carried this headline:

### **MORE THAN 800 JAPS KILLED AND 30 TAKEN PRISONERS BY MARINES IN ISLAND**

Headquarters, United States Pacific fleet, Pearl Harbor (UP) United States marines killed 842 Japanese and took 30 prisoners in a raid on the Gilbert Islands and in two ferocious fights in the Solomons, and it was reported today that they might even now be engaged in new offensive operations against enemy bases.

In the Solomons the marines wiped out the entire Japanese reinforcement battalion of 700 men, killing 670 and taking 30 prisoners, and killed 92 in another fight.

#### *August 22<sup>nd</sup> Sat.:*

Max's dad called & Max wants a date both Tues. & Fri. I'll see if I can't get off Fri. George called twice. He's going to Arizona. Wrote George a letter. I've been thinking it's mostly his fault that I don't feel the same. Girls are older in years than fellows & when he matures it'll be diff.

He usually seems a lot older than me but not lately!

After work changed into my white suit. We went to the show. Started at 1:20 for our shift. Now Bob says he's going to marry me. What'll I do now! At least he's sensible and will wait a few years.

#### *August 23:*

What a day at work! Not so many shells to pack so we just had a good time. Bob was so cute, kept us laughing all day. He looks like Tom Brown of the movies & acts like Mickey Rooney. Wrote me a cute little note and said did he have to wait until I'm 23? If I hurt him too I'm quitting - I just like him lots, he's so darn likable. Mrs. Shepherd left for Calif. George called twice. He's going to Arizona.

#### *August 24, Mon.:*

Stayed all night with Jessey, our foreman. (Woman) After work we rode into town with "Papa" Burns, our superintendent. We were going over to see them shoot the tracers but Dora was in a hurry & we didn't tell her she was spoiling our plans. Slept with Jessey's roommate.

The Ames Tribune featured this August 25<sup>th</sup> front-page report:



## **MEN OF IOWA TOLD TO GET READY**

Des Moines (UP) Brig. Gen. Charles H. Grahl, Iowa Selective Service Director, today warned that married men without children or with only one child should be prepared to enter the army soon.

He said the local draft boards will begin inducting married men with dependents in October and by the end of the year induction of such men will be heavy.

*August 25 Tues.:*

Got up at 7:30, had breakfast. Walked with what's his name half way to work. Then went over to the millionaire's "Mr. Hubbel" & his gardener gave us some flowers. Bought food for lunch. Walked over & ate at Ding Darling's home. Went to town by taxi & ate dinner at Scondra's & then to the show, "Talk of the Town." Then work. Certainly had a grand time & Jesse wouldn't let me pay for a thing. George's birthday.

*August 26 Wed.:*

Marilyn has decided to go to Simpson. I do hope she likes it. I got her two sweaters. George was up last night when I got home from work. It was his birthday. He had his ankle hurt & was limping & I felt so sorry for him because I don't love him, he was so hurt. I cried myself to sleep.

The front-page headline on the Ames paper:

### **ALLIES CARRY FIGHT TO AXIS**

#### **Attack Japanese With Renewed Fury In Solomon Islands**

By Harrison Salisbury

United Press Staff Correspondent

Allied forces carried the fight to the enemy on three critical battle sectors of the war today – the southwest Pacific, the Egyptian desert and the flaming Russian front.

From the Solomons to the key bases of Burma and wide areas of south China the Japanese were under attack by land, sea and air.

Another report told this story:

### **BATTLESHIP IOWA SLIDES DOWN WAYS AT BROOKLYN YARD**

#### **Mrs. Henry Wallace Christens New Super Dreadnaught**

Brooklyn Navy Yard, New York (UP) - The battleship Iowa, mightiest dreadnaught in the fast growing American fleet, was launched today, perhaps "to take part in that final climactic operation of all the war – the invasion of the continent of Europe or the Island of Japan."



Both Henry and Mrs. Wallace were native Iowans. Henry Wallace had served as Secretary of Agriculture in FDR's cabinet and was Vice President in 1942.

*August 27, Thurs.:*

*Went to work & Bob came over & said "You cried last night didn't you?" Heavens how did he know & he wanted to know why I did. Of course I wouldn't tell him. Harold Allen won't work with our department any more. We certainly will miss him.*

Beverly moved home to Pleasantville. Smiley and I planned a double date. He was dating Pauline Larson of Roland. It was a good 75 miles between Pleasantville and Roland. I didn't always adhere to the wartime 35 mile an hour speed limit, but avoided going too far over. We had to schedule time for old Jessie's travel on this occasion.

Beverly wanted me to drive the 15 miles west from Pleasantville to Indianola, so she could see her younger sister who had started to college at Simpson. She wanted to visit Marilyn and help make her feel at home to prevent her becoming homesick and leaving before she had given college life a chance. Beverly had so enjoyed her two years at Simpson and wished the same for Marilyn.

Monday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, was a night off work for Beverly and me and the evening of our double date with Smiley and Pauline. Unfortunately we couldn't see our way clear for the trip to Indianola, allowing sufficient time for Beverly and Marilyn to visit, then drive to Ames for picking up Smiley and on to Roland to pick up Pauline. We decided to make the Simpson College trip the next day, allowing Beverly time to help Marilyn settle in and still get to work by 4:00 p.m.

I drove old Jessie to Pleasantville Monday evening, picked up Beverly at her aunt and uncle's home and drove to Ames and Roland then back to Ames. The four of us went to a movie at the Collegian. After getting out about 11:00 p.m. in downtown Ames, I checked Jessie's gas gauge. It was very low, but I figured we could make it to Roland for Smiley to escort Pauline home. At that time of night no gas would be available in Roland. Old Jessie would definitely need gas by the time Beverly, Smiley and I got back to Ames.

We headed north on Highway 69 and turned off onto the Roland road. A few miles west of Pauline's house the motor commenced to sputter. I reached for the choke and pulled it out. The choking allowed the motor to run smoothly just briefly. It died. No matter how I much I ground away with the starter it would not start. Rather than continuing to drain the battery I got out with the hand crank and turned the engine over a number of times. It would not start. I knew it was out of gas.

Smiley and Pauline set out on foot for her home in the town of Roland. Beverly and I got into the back seat and snuggled. At the first signs of daylight I walked to a farmer's home where light shown through a window. I knocked on the front door. A man answered. I explained my plight. I followed



the farmer to a 50-gallon metal barrel resting on a sawbuck beside an old wooden shed. He picked up a one-gallon clear glass vinegar jug, turned the spigot and drained gas from the barrel into the jug. I tried to pay him but he refused to take my change and told me to keep the jug.

When I got back to Ames I stopped at Fall Inn, crossing a black alarm cable in the drive that notified an attendant a vehicle had pulled onto the drive. A young man came out, filled the tank, checked the oil and wiped the windshield. I drove to Smiley's house. Only his mother was home. Smiley hitchhiked home from Roland and had already walked to work at the Highway Commission. Mrs. De Hoet prepared a quick breakfast for Beverly and me. As we ate she prepared two separate beds and insisted we get some sleep before heading for Indianola to see Marilyn.

Mrs. De Hoet woke us at noon as we had requested. I had slept so deeply that I didn't recognize Beverly walking from a bedroom toward me across the living room. Mrs. De Hoet insisted we eat lunch, explaining we would have to take "pot luck." After downing a good meal Beverly and I thanked Mrs. De Hoet for her deeply appreciated hospitality and boarded old Jessie for the 50 mile trip to Indianola. We arrived at Simpson College about 3:00 p.m.

Beverly instructed me where to park. I parked old Jessie in a gravel parking lot of the building where she could ask about Marilyn. She got out and walked hurriedly to the building. Prepared for a long wait, I got out of the car, checked the tires wired on back then got down on my knees in the gravel and looked under the car to check the brake linings. I saw Beverly walking briskly toward the car, her customary smile replaced by a frown.

"She left a half hour ago," said Beverly in disgust.

"Can we drive somewhere to find her?"

"I mean she left for good! She's not here. She went back to Knoxville."

"Really?! And we just missed her?"

"I knew I should've been here last night! Now, she'll never come back."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Beverly."

I opened the right front door for her and she got in. We started back toward Des Moines. Beverly sat silently at the right side of the front seat. This had all happened before. We drove to Adair so she could see her dad and he had gone before we arrived. I kept thinking how she wanted to be with Marilyn the day before.

We were moving north along two-lane Highway 65-69 at just over the wartime speed limit when we started down a long slope between Indianola and Des Moines. I pressed on the brake pedal to slow the car, but it went down to the floorboard. I knew the bailing wire holding my makeshift pulley belt brake linings onto the brake shoes had worn through, dropping the worn linings somewhere behind us. Ole Jessie was completely without brakes. We were speeding down hill faster and faster. The speedometer pointer was soon resting on the peg at the top speed for '29 Chevies - 80 mph. I knew we were going over 80 and gaining speed as we glided downward. I was concerned we would soon catch up to the car ahead.



"We have no brakes," I told Beverly.

She stared straight ahead in silence.

We were rapidly approaching the car ahead. At a lower speed I could manipulate the gears to slow old Jessie down but we were moving at a high rate of speed. We finally reached the bottom of the hill. Our speed was finally down below 40. The car ahead commenced to pull away. We had made it without ramming another vehicle.

Going through the city of Des Moines was very tricky. I geared old Jessie down for a stoplight, then moved along at the speed of other traffic, always staying several yards behind the vehicle ahead, prepared to ride up over the curb to avoid hitting anyone, if necessary. We finally reached Ankeny and the ordnance plant. Beverly hadn't uttered a word from the time we left Simpson.

I blamed myself for Beverly having missed Marilyn. She blamed herself for her younger sister leaving college. Marilyn never went back.

*September 7 Mon.:*

*Day off! Went over to the schoolhouse & watched the dedication of stars to boys in the service. Bob came at 6:30. We had to get Smiley's girl so couldn't go to Simpson like I wanted.*

*If I only had! Went to show & on way to Roland Jessey (car) broke down & we spent most of the night there. Had dinner at Smiles' & set out for Indianola but too late. Marilyn had left a half hour before. Freshman test scared her out. If only I'd gone last night!*

I got up the next morning and went out to work on old Jessie. I crawled underneath and repaired the brakes. The noisy muffler had to be fixed, too. I wrapped a sheet of asbestos around it, covering the hole in the side of the muffler. I then wrapped a sheet of tin around it, wiring it in place.

*September 8, Tues.:*

*Getting caught up on sleep again. I must have Jessey home with me sometime. She's so swell & was so wonderful to me. I'm still just sick about Marilyn quitting before she got started. I just know she would have liked it. Chick is here.*

I got notes off to Beverly, stood packing shells into the tin lined boxes and flirted at times with other young ladies. Barbara Maring, tomboyish dishwater blond with blue eyes, was from Grinnell, Iowa. She spent a good deal of time working at a conveyor between Beverly and me. She stood about 5' 6" and was attractively slim. Barb had given herself the name, "Sally." We guys felt comfortable exchanging risqué humor with her. I attempted repeating the poem Paul Young had taught me so Beverly would not overhear. Sally sat at the conveyor. I bent over so she could hear me over the normal factory noises.

"The pioneers they have no fears.

They live in caves and ditches.

They fuck their wives with butcher knives



The dirty sons-of-bitches.  
They pound their cocks with big hard rocks.  
But these are only trifles.  
They hang their balls upon the walls.  
And shoot them down with rifles."

Sally's burst of laughter attracted considerable attention. I headed back to work across from Paul.

*September 9, Wed.:*

*I certainly felt low all day long. Bob & Paul worked together & for some reason it always makes me mad. I don't care for Paul & what he stands for & Bob seems to be enjoying himself in his company. Bob told Barbara a terrible joke & it just made me sick of both of them for a while. George here - I was mean - feel sorry.*

*September 10 Thurs.:*

*Barbara's day off. I ate with Clara & Edith - like them both a lot. Bob was so sweet - sent me the cutest proposal. He plans to marry me after this conflict. I packed all day - not so good had those cheap boxes that slow production. George was here said he'd not come back."*

*September 11, Fri.:*

*Bob came to work with the nicest letter for me. He seems to think a lot of me. Flirts with everyone else though. Hope he doesn't propose to marry us all after the war. George was in Carlisle waiting. We didn't get along. He still says I'll marry him someday & if I don't he'll not have anyone else.*

Friday was payday. I stopped by Fall Inn on my way home. Pete Sherman led me into the garage area and pointed to a shelf high on the west side of the garage. There were the four black 16-inch wheels I had ordered. Next to them were 16-inch vulcanized tires. Pete climbed a ladder and brought down the black metal wheels, then made the necessary trips up and down the ladder for the tires. He removed the old 19-inch wheels from old Jessie, mounted the retreads on the wheels and put them on the car. The old disc wheels and tires were left to be melted down for defense materials.

The September 11<sup>th</sup> Ames Tribune front-page headline:

**RUSSIANS IN FIGHT TO DEATH**

**Major Center of Axis Industry Is Pounded By RAF**

By Harrison Salisbury

United Press Staff Correspondent

*The Nazi attack on Stalingrad today neared a peak, but far west of the Russian fighting front the royal air force delivered a pulverizing bombardment on the war arsenal of Duesselforf.*



*With the German war machine concentrating its energy on the reduction of the 'Red Verdun' of Stalingrad, the RAF threw an attack of almost 1,000 plane scope at one of the centers of Axis war industry.*

*London reported that Duesseldorf steel and arms plants were rocked by salvo after salvo of bombs from the heaviest British bomb-carriers. It was the heaviest attack the RAF had made on a Nazi target in nearly six weeks and Britain reports left little doubt that serious damage was inflicted.*

*The Duesseldorf attack cost the British 31 planes, indicating a big force was employed.*

*At Stalingrad the Russian defenders had blown up the Volga river bridge and destroyed all boats to remove any possibility or temptation of retreat. The Red army organ, Red Star, said that it now was a fight to the finish with the repulse of the Germans the alternative to death.*

*Cal Flogstad and Randall Trotter, two former Ames High athletes and friends of Bruce, Paul and me, had been serving in the Philippines, but had not been heard from in months. It was assumed they had been captured or killed by the Japs during the Bataan death march in April.*

*I drove old Jessie to downtown Ames, sporting her new wheels and retread tires, early Saturday afternoon, September 12<sup>th</sup>, prior to heading for Ankeny. Two famous movie stars, Gene Tierney, an attractive dark haired blue-eyed movie queen, and Chester Morris, a black haired brown-eyed film and radio star, were involved in a war bond drive. They appeared on a huge wooden platform set up on Main Street in front of the Sheldon-Munn Hotel at the northwest corner of Kellogg Avenue and Main. Chester Morris was well known for playing the title role in the network radio series, "Boston Blackie."*

*A parade from the park on the east side of Ames that moved west along Main Street featured the Iowa State Training Station naval cadets, and the "Monkey Squad," of the Iowa State Guard stationed at Camp Dodge presenting a military drill. Thousands were in attendance as the movie stars autographed war bonds being sold to the public.*

*All ordnance plant employees had been encouraged to gather in front of the Administration building on Saturday, Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>. We experienced chills of pride as the U. S. Rubber Company plant manager ordered the raising of the red and white flag, bearing the huge "E" for "effort," honoring DMOP for out-producing all other .50 calibre plants in the nation. We truly felt we were carrying our share of the nation's defense effort load.*

#### *September 12, Sat.:*

*Saturday night - only it certainly doesn't seem like it. If I still lived in Ankeny Bob & I would have gone to Ames. Our .50 calibre building put out the largest production over all plants of its kind over the United States, makes one feel important in this war. Rode with Dee since we missed Kirk, he'd gone to Pella.*



One hot September day Paul and I noticed that fewer and fewer of the big metal lined wood boxes were coming through on the overhead conveyor. Paul walked over a few steps to look down the conveyor, but couldn't determine what was causing the shortage. I stacked a few extra boxes, giving us a little bit of a reserve so we could keep packing. We soon went through the reserve and had to reach for the few boxes still coming through on the conveyor.

Suddenly, a tall gentleman with black hair, pointed nose and squinty eyes, leaped over a conveyor belt, landing a few feet from me. He reached for a box dangling from the overhead conveyor with his left hand, then grabbed the last one on the conveyor with his other hand, leaving none for me.

"What the hell do ya think you're doin'?" he bellowed.

"What the hell do ya think you're doin'?" I shouted. "We need those!"

"I need 'em!" he came back.

"We're not getting enough for our work here!"

"Too damned bad!" he shouted. "I need 'em over there!"

"You'd better get your ass outa here while you can still make it!"

"I'll see you outside after work!" he threatened.

"That's a date, baby!" I assured.

He walked away with the two boxes.

"See you at midnight, fella!" he shouted back.

Paul had continued filling one of the last boxes available. I walked down the conveyor line and grabbed the first box coming along, placed it on the rollers and commenced packing.

"That's the famous wife beater," Paul said.

"That's him?" I asked. "I've heard the girls mention him."

"If you're gonna meet him after work," Paul went on, "watch out."

"Oh, I'll meet him all right."

"He could carry a knife, ya know."

"I imagine. I'd hate to kill him with his own knife."

Paul and I laughed. Rumors of the verbal clash traveled throughout our division. Beverly informed me by note that it would be foolish on my part to do anything but ignore that "wife beater."

At midnight I followed Beverly through the time clock line. When she and I reached a point about ten feet from the clock our conversation was rudely interrupted. The tall guy had made his way through the crowd and stood next to me.

"We have a date, buddy!" said the tall guy.

"Be right with ya!"

"Oh Bob," said Beverly in disgust. "Don't get into it with him."

The guy moved in close behind me, sticking right with me. Beverly placed card number 137 into the clock slot and returned it to the card rack.



I grabbed card 181 and placed it into the slot. Following the clicking sound I placed the card back on the rack. I left Beverly with the other girls and hurried to the door and outside with the tall guy.

I walked past the guard and headed for my car. I thought I may still be able to ignore the guy as Beverly suggested and that he may head for his car and forget about fighting. But he stayed right behind me. Just before we got to my car I felt a blow on the back of my neck. I turned around quickly, nailing him with a left fist to the side of his right cheek. The right fist followed automatically directly to his left eye. He came back with two blows that landed around my neck and shoulders. I sneaked two quick blows to his stomach, doubling him over, then drove a straight right into his jaw, dropping him backward onto the right front fender of my car. I realized Bud Bates, who was riding with me, had arrived. There were others vaguely visible in the bluish hues of light from the tall posts located at various points in the parking lot.

My opponent was strong and quick. He had grabbed my neck in a strangling attempt. As his grip tightened on my neck it became more and more difficult to breathe. I pumped a rapid series of blows to his jaw and directly into his eyes. The more I hit the harder and faster the blows. He finally released his hold on my neck to defend himself with his arms and hands. My barrage continued.

"Enough!" he called through heavy rapid panting. "I've had enough!"

"Let him up, Bob," said Bud Bates. "He's had enough."

I stepped to the side of the fender allowing the tall guy to get on his feet. He hurried around the front end of old Jessie, headed south and out of sight.

"You sure put that big devil away!" Bud said. "What started it, anyway?"

"Oh," I said, haltingly, breathing deeply, "it really . . . started over . . . almost nuthin'."

I reached my scratched burning neck. My top shirt button was missing. Bud and I got into old Jessie and pulled away. I answered his questions about how the fight came about as we drove to Ames.

The next morning Jessie, our section manager, hurried over to me as I prepared for work. Paul hadn't yet arrived.

"R. J., you're to report to Mr. Burns' office right away."

"Okay," I said, turning to walk briskly toward the hallway.

She hadn't used his nickname, "Pappa," but called him "Mister." I knew I was definitely in hot water. When I got to the office the tall guy was already standing at Mr. Burn's desk. I assumed I had already been blamed for the fight and expected to be fired. The tall guy glanced at me, then quickly away. His face bore black and blue marks. The left eye was black and swollen nearly shut. I stood next to him facing Mr. Burns across the desk.

Mr. Burns rose from his chair, his knuckles pressing on the desktop. He took a few seconds to look us over, obviously not pleased.

"I understand you two had a little misunderstanding," Mr. Burns said sternly.



"Yeah," said the tall guy anxiously. "That's what it was all right . . . just a misunderstanding."

"Was that it, Clark?" asked Mr. Burns.

"Yep!"

"We have a war to win, fellas! There's no time for misunderstandings! Now you two shake hands . . . and get back to work!"

The tall guy quickly extended his hand. My right hand joined his. We quickly ended the handshake.

Mr. Burns sat back down. The tall guy walked through the office passageway and headed north. I followed, turning south, greatly relieved. I felt Mr. Burns had discerned the outcome of the conflict and was not disappointed. My concern was Beverly's opinion of me.

I took my station across from Paul and started packing shell boxes. When I felt I could chance it I glanced over at Beverly hard at work beside the conveyor. She looked up and smiled. I thought her girl friends may have spoken of the fight with her, approving the outcome. She never mentioned it to me and I said nothing.

I stopped by the Ames High football practice field east of the Highway Commission building on Lincoln Way in Ames. Assistant coach Ray Smalling, wearing a light gray sweat suit with a whistle dangling on a string around his neck, was conducting a scrimmage. He motioned to me. I walked over to him.

"Where's that brother of yours?" he demanded.

"Paul?" I asked, knowing full well which of the seven he meant. "He's in Idaho."

"Tell him the association gave him the okay! Get him back here!"

I sat down as soon as I got home and wrote Paul a letter, telling him exactly what Ray had told me. Paul had already commenced high school classes at Montpelier, Idaho and was playing football there. By the time my letter reached him his Iowa transcripts had been sent to Montpelier High School. He was dropped from the Montpelier team. Moreover, he had a new girl friend named "Beverly." He dropped out of school in Idaho and returned home to play football for Ames High. He brought home an 8 x 10" framed picture of his girl.

On our day off I introduced Paul to Beverly. He joined us in Ames. He brought along the picture, introducing Beverly to Beverly. We three went to a movie at the Collegian Theater in Ames, taking up four seats, one for Paul's picture of his Beverly.

Bruce wanted to join the marines before the draft board inducted him and sent him to the army or some other branch. With Dad still in Idaho I had the only car in the family. Bruce asked if I would drive him to the recruiting station in Des Moines. I told him to give me a little notice and I would get him down there. He did.



Bruce packed a small bag and said goodbye to Mom and the kids. He, Paul and I drove in old Jessie to Des Moines. At the recruiting station a marine sergeant welcomed us.

"If the three of you join up," the sergeant promised, "we'll make sure you stay together."

Bruce looked at Paul and me.

"I can't," Paul replied. "I'm still in high school."

"What about you?" the sergeant asked me.

"Not me. I'm goin' into the air corps."

"Okay, guys," he replied, "but, it's the only chance you'll have for the three of you to remain together through this war."

Paul and I stood silently. The sergeant looked first at one, then the other of us. Neither of us responded.

"Right this way then, Bruce," the recruiter said, leading the way toward a door at the opposite end of the room from where we had entered. Bruce picked up his little bag, turned and shook hands with me, then Paul, moving toward the door to follow the sergeant.

"See you guys!" he said, waving with his free hand.

"Good luck," Paul and I shouted in unison, waving back.

Bruce disappeared through the doorway. As if ignoring the emotion of the moment Paul and I made our way out of the recruiting office and into old Jessie for the ride home.

All the guys and gals from the ordnance plant sang popular songs when we were together, often riding from place to place in our old cars. Some of the lyrics as Beverly remembered them made their way into her diary.

#### *September 17:*

*Praise The Lord & Pass The Ammunition & we'll all stay free!  
Glory be.*

*We're on a mighty mission - all aboard we're on a mighty mission  
& not a going fishing.*

*So praise the lord & pass the ammunition & we'll all be free.*

My brother Paul received news that he was not eligible to play football at Ames High. He was tired being jacked around. With the picture of his girl friend inside a packed bag he hitchhiked back to Idaho to continue his senior year.

Beverly always selected movies she and I attended. A new Bing Crosby film was scheduled to open at the Grand in downtown Des Moines. It was a fine old theater located on Grand Avenue, around the corner from the Greyhound bus depot at Fifth and Grand. After work one evening Beverly and I went to the Grand where we saw "Holiday Inn."

In that movie Bing introduced the Irving Berlin song, "White Christmas." We thought it a beautiful motion picture and were fascinated by the music and lyric of "White Christmas." Many older folks spoke of that title's traditional meaning and why people prayed for a white Christmas. A black



Christmas (one with no snow) forecast a winter of heavy deaths. A white Christmas forecast few deaths through the winter following the holiday. It had a very special meaning to millions during that critical wartime period.

#### *September 18:*

*I'm dreaming of a white Xmas just like the ones I used to know. Where the tree tops glisten and children listen to hear sleigh bells in the snow.* (Her notes of this special song were partially written in shorthand)

Wednesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, was Beverly's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and, fortunately, our day off. She arranged for a Pleasantville friend, Dolores Guest, to be Smiley's date for a picnic.

I drove old Jessie into Ames and picked Smiles up at his house. We drove the 32 miles south to Des Moines then southeast about 20 miles to Pleasantville where we picked up Beverly. The three of us met Delores at her home then drove south of Pleasantville about 5 miles, turning east on a gravel road. We rounded a curve, parked old Jessie at the side of the road, carried food baskets prepared by the ladies from the car down into the ditch, up the other side, stopping at a fence. Smiley and I held the barbed wire strands apart for the girls to climb through the fence. Once they were on the other side, we handed them the baskets and climbed through the fence, taking the baskets and finding a flat grassy spot beneath huge shade trees.

While maneuvering through the fence, Smiley lost his Ames High School class ring. The four of us searched the area for a long time but never found it.

We had a good picnic, thoroughly enjoying the food and each other's company, then drove to Des Moines to attend a movie. Back at Pleasantville we saw each of the girls to her door and drove back to Ames. Beverly's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday had been a real joy and a most memorable occasion.

#### *September 23:*

*My birthday & Bob & Smiley came. It happens to be our day off, too. Bob brought me some stationery, city set - rouge & lipstick & his picture will be later. I got Dolores Guest for Smiles. We had a picnic & a show. It was a very successful birthday. Bob made it complete.*

Referring to my home county of Story in central Iowa this October 5th front-page article appeared in the Ames Tribune:

#### **STORY GETS RATIONING WARNING**

##### **Fuel Oil By Oct. 15, Gas Late in November**

*A warning that fuel oil will be rationed by Oct. 15 and gasoline will be under the same regulations by the latter part of November was received at the office of the local rationing board from state headquarters at Des Moines.*

*No other word of clarification or explanation of the order was received by local officials, who said that just how much gas and fuel oil will be available is not known at this time.*



*At a meeting of the seven local tire inspectors in the rationing office Wednesday methods were discussed for more uniform services in inspection of tires with a view toward getting as equitable results as possible.*

*The inspectors agreed on measures that would be as satisfactory as possible to patrons while at the same time remain within the rationing board quotas, officials said.*

*The seven tire inspection stations are: Fall Oil Company, 510 Lincoln Way; Firestone Store, 215 Main Street; Montgomery Ward Tire Shop, 316 Fifth Street; Brintnall Service, 416 Burnett Avenue; Smutz Service, 2602 Lincoln Way and Si's Shell Service, Story City.*

*For the 10 days from Sept. 15 to 24 applications for 33 new truck tires and three passenger tires were approved by the board. Three new passenger and six truck tubes along with 32 truck recaps and 29 passenger recaps were also on the approved list.*

Beverly and I bought clothes to match for an evening skating party. She wore tan slacks and a chocolate brown blouse. I wore tan pants and a chocolate brown sport shirt. We both wore tan sport coats.

Beverly spent the night with Ruth Dyer, a good friend of hers from Pleasantville. The two had attended Simpson together. She had left something at Ruth's apartment and asked if I would drive her there. The next day I drove old Jessie along Harding Road turning left in the middle of the block into a short driveway. Several large rocks prevented drivers from going too far. I stepped on the brake pedal as soon as I saw the rocks ahead, but Jessie's brakes failed. When I hit the center rock old Jessie's front end rode up and over it.

I went inside with Beverly and met Ruth, a very pleasant blue-eyed blond with a keen sense of humor. She was about Beverly's height. I liked Ruth from the first instant I saw her. She and Beverly commenced talking when we entered the apartment. To me their incessant chatter was like listening to music. They exchanged comments, laughed, then exchanged comments and laughed. The unique discourse was cut short when Beverly mentioned the urgency of getting to work.

We got back into old Jessie. The rock was still under the front end of the car. We heard metal scrape the top of the rock as I backed. Turning to back onto the street I felt the steering wheel drag. I had bent the tie rod. Once past the sticking point the car steered fine, so we hurried on back to work at the plant.

During the fall our ordnance plant touch football team played an irregular schedule after getting off work at 4:00 p.m. Among others, Paul and I drove our cars loaded with guys and gals to the Des Moines parks where our games were played. The girls prepared picnic snacks. Beer cooled on ice while we played.



One evening Beverly invited the gang to Pleasantville for treats at her uncle's drug store soda fountain after the game and picnic. She had brought along a key to the store.

The cold beer following the game was quite pleasing to me. I hadn't eaten since noon and drank more beer than I should have. It was decided old Jessie would remain at the park. The trip to Pleasantville was made in Paul Young's convertible. Beverly demonstrated in her own quiet way that she did not approve of my imbibing by riding in front with her girl friends while I was encouraged to ride in the rumble seat for the fresh air. We bantered humorous remarks and sang as we sped along between Des Moines and Pleasantville. Eventually I was forced to lean over the left side to vomit, attempting to avoid the fender.

#### *October 5:*

*I've stayed overnight during this time with Claudia, Barbara, Betty Mitchell and Ruth. Once our department had a skating party. I stayed with Ruth. Bob and I dressed alike & certainly had a good time. Ruth agreed with me that Bob was more my type than anyone I've ever gone with. Then again, there was a picnic. All the boys drank and Bob not being used to it over drank. Was really polluted. Paul Young, Fargo, Clara and Barb brought me to Pleasantville with Bob in the rumble seat cooling off. I tried to be mad about it but he's too cute to really be mad at.*

Bare Drug store, facing north on Monroe Street, at the center of Pleasantville's main drag, had been in the Bare family a good half century. At the drug store I weathered a barrage of jokes for being unable to hold my beer. After witnessing the jocularity, Beverly dropped her angry pretense. Her blue eyes radiated as she worked away at the soda fountain. Dick Fargo, Paul, Clara, Sally (Barb) and I sat on stools watching her demonstrate her ability preparing cokes, banana splits, sodas and malts. After mixing the best cherry coke I ever tasted she made one for herself, occupied the stool at the left end of the counter and enjoyed the tasty refreshments with the rest of us. Following this unforgettable episode Paul drove north with all of us aboard, dropping Beverly at her house.

It was dark by the time we got back to the park in Des Moines. Paul drove his car in parallel to old Jessie and stopped.

"Look," Paul joked, "somebody stuck fenders on the old thing! Looks almost like a real car."

The gang laughing at Paul's caustic humor only encouraged him to continue.

"Is that thing powered by a rubber band, R. J.?"

"She's a sensitive old girl. You could injure her feelings."

"I'll wait til ya try it. You'll probably need a push."

"Thanks! I might at that!"



I got out of Paul's rumble seat and into old Jessie. She started right up. I pulled away, leaving Paul and the others laughing and waving in the darkness.

This front-page report appeared in the Ames Tribune of October 5, 1942:

### **GERMANS LAUNCH TERRIFIC ASSAULT**

*Moscow (UP) – The Germans have launched another terrific drive in a desperate try for a knockout blow on the Volga.*

*More than 100 clanking Nazi tanks and hundreds of roaring planes are storming the narrowest part of the battered defenses, seeking to blast a path into the heart of the city.*

*Screaming dive-bombers are hurling tons of smoking metal into the ruins ahead of the attack in an effort to pulverize resistance and the city is ablaze.*

*But so are the hearts of its gallant defenders – citizens and soldiers fighting side by side, spurred on by new exhortations from the Communist Party organ Pravda – 'Stand firm – Fulfill your sacred duty – Hold Stalingrad.'*

*So hard and so valiantly are the Russians fighting that more than 12 terrible new Nazi lunges have been halted. Only at one point have the German tanks made any significant gain. There in a workers settlement in the northwest sector of the city, the Russians admit the Germans have knifed deeper into the Russian positions.*

*But the German cost is heavy. Captured enemy soldiers say the Germans call the broad avenue leading to the center of the city 'The Road to Death' – littered with hundreds of unburied corpses and the smoldering wreckage of hundreds of German tanks.*

Gas rationing was about to become effective. I located a cylindrical 50-gallon metal drum lying in the grass just east of the barn. I drained it of all moisture and carried it up to the front porch and went back for the wooden sawbuck setting in front of the barn. I carried it to the house and placed it directly in front of the double windows on the concrete porch. Mom came out to see what I was doing.

"What are you doing with all this?" she asked.

"I'm gonna have this drum filled with gas before rationing starts."

"I don't want that there. We can't have gasoline that close to the house. Besides, everybody going by can see it."

"Why worry about what people see?"

"It's hoarding! That's why!"

"Lots of people are storin' gas now."

She turned away and went back inside, expressing her disapproval by letting the screen door slam behind her.

I had already ordered the gas from a petroleum firm I knew to be making farm deliveries so I left the drum in the sawbuck on the porch. A couple days



later the kids told me that when I was at work the petroleum company driver had come by and filled it. Mom said nothing.

Beverly invited me to a steak fry at her home on a Saturday night. I drove down to Pleasantville on that cool crisp October evening. There I met Beverly's Aunt Fern, her mother's sister, and her Uncle Lloyd, both in their forties. They had raised Beverly following her mother's death 14 years earlier. Uncle Lloyd operated Pleasantville's only pharmacy with the highly popular soda fountain.

I felt at ease talking and joking with Beverly's aunt and uncle on that clear crisp fall evening. Uncle Lloyd, a rather slim, black haired man with dark eyes and about 5' 10" in height, was in charge of cooking the steaks. Aunt Fern had a trim figure, stood slightly taller than Beverly with a pleasant smile, soft appearing skin, sparkling blue Galvin eyes and hair prematurely turning from light sandy to white. She and Beverly left me to visit with Uncle Lloyd while they brought food and eating utensils out to the lawn behind the house. The salad, baked potatoes and steaks were delicious. We all ate heartily and enjoyed a good visit.

*October 7<sup>th</sup> the 10<sup>th</sup>:*

*Clara, Esther, Barb, Edythe & myself make up the gruesome five-some that eat together. It used to be just Barb & I. At recesses just Barb, Bob & I. That was fun. Then Fargo joined. Now Clara's back & things are some different. We do have fun.*

*Millie will be moved over to the new building as forelady. Clara will take Jessie's days off.*

*Bob & I have now doubled with Joe & June, Dick & Dot which ought to make them happy but I don't like them as well as Smiles & his girls. Bob's friends are all so swell.*

*My dad's back in Adair. Hope Bob will take me back to see him again.*

*Ruth Trowbridge is here, she isn't influencing Marilyn right.*

*Sat. night we had a steak fry in the backyard & Bob came was very nice.*

*Well all I know is I'm 20 & in love. Sounds logical doesn't it. If this doesn't work out I give up! No more romances for a long time, too much heart breaks.*

We were back on the day shift, commencing work at 8:00 a.m., Central War Time and getting off at 4:00 p.m. The weather was perfect. After a very warm day, the skies were clear and temperatures in the 70s.

Old Jessie was filled with guys and gals from our section at the plant. Paul Young sat at the right rear window peeling a banana. He rolled the window down and dropped the banana peel.

"There goes a fender," Paul said quite straight-faced.



Laughter from the crowd was immediate. Sally commenced the singing with, "Don't sit under the apple tree . . . " We all chimed in . . . "With anyone else but me. . . anyone else but me . . . anyone else but me . . . no, no, no." When that song was finished someone started another and everyone joined in the singing. I drove to the Des Moines park where we played 7-man touch football.

We faced a formidable opponent, calling on all our team's effort to keep the other team's ball carriers out of our end zone. On offense our blocking had been inconsistent all through the game. Time was running out and the score was tied at zero. The opposing team drove all the way down the field, but we held right at our goal line and got the ball back. I told Paul I thought I could score if given the chance. He suggested to the others on our team that I carry the ball. It was agreed. I knew I could run faster on the grassy field without shoes and socks so I removed them. We lined up. I stood a few feet behind the center. He "hupped" the ball back between his legs to me. I ran swiftly around the left end and was stopped after a short gain. My run had impressed our players and caused consternation among the enemy. I pleaded for more solid blocking, assigning each of our guys to block a specific defensive man. The center zipped the ball back to me. He ran forward, making his block. I raced around the right end. Our blocking had improved. After turning the corner I headed straight down the center of the field. Most of the defensive players were being blocked or slowed by my teammates. I had one man to beat. He was running toward me at top speed. I stepped up my pace and headed straight for him. As I approached him he crouched. I leaped over him and raced on for the touchdown. Our kicker made the conversion giving us the seventh point. Time ran out.

After the game, we enjoyed a picnic with the girls on blankets. Someone commenced the singing with, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." "White Cliffs of Dover" followed and then "Chattanooga Choo-Choo." Beverly and I enjoyed being with the crowd and I was in seventh heaven just being with her. I knew how deeply involved I was, but had made certain not to utter those three little words to Beverly.

Intuition told me my perfect world was about to be jolted. Beverly took the highly unusual step of telephoning me at home, commencing the conversation by making a few light-hearted remarks.

"I know you have bad news for me," I said. "Just tell me what it is."

"Well," she hesitated. "I . . . I felt I should tell you . . . I've been invited to a fraternity dance at Simpson Saturday night."

"This is a bad phone line," I explained. "It's a country party line. Can't we talk about it when we get to work?"

She agreed. When I got to work and clocked in, Beverly had already clocked in and was waiting for me near the time clock in the hallway.

"How did you know what I was going to say . . . even before I called you today?" she asked.

"I guess I'm just tuned in to you."



"Well, I don't like that. It gives me an eerie feeling. You always know all about me."

"You've already promised to go, haven't ya?"

"Yes," she replied curtly.

I stood contemplating just what it all meant. Beverly stood with her head bowed. She had obviously said all she was going to say on the subject. I would not only miss a Saturday night with her but she would be out on a date with someone else.

"Well," I finally replied submissively. "No kissin'!"

"No . . . there won't be."

Our conversation ended there. She walked to her workstation and I went to mine. There were no notes exchanged that day. Realizing Beverly would be with an old college boyfriend made my head spin. That familiar hollow feeling swept my stomach. I was headed for a lonely weekend. Although I hadn't dated anyone but Beverly for months I actually considered asking one of the other girls at work for a date that Saturday night.

Edythe Danielson, an attractive young lady a couple inches taller than Beverly, was my choice. She had dimples and a pretty smile, blue eyes and black hair. She was staying at the home of a married sister in Ames. I was sure dating Edythe would certainly get Beverly's attention. The two had become very good friends.

Word of Beverly's plans circulated rapidly throughout our section. I was stunned to learn Beverly had arranged a dance date for Edythe with a Simpson student. Beverly and Edythe would be double dating. Where were Jessie and Millie when I needed them? Millie, our "Available Jones," had transferred to the new building. Jessie was overwhelmed with an ever-expanding work force. I was definitely on my own in this one.

Beverly planned to spend the Friday night prior to the dance with Edythe. I had promised to pick Beverly up at Edythe's and drive her out to the college where she would look up one of her sorority sisters.

I concentrated on dating one of Beverly's friends. There were a number of attractive young ladies in our section at work. Clara, who had assumed some of the management duties, was very attractive. She was pretty with long dark brown hair, big brown eyes and full lips. Although slightly taller than me, she had a magnificent figure. I wasted no time asking if she'd like to attend a movie with me Saturday night. She accepted. Word spread rapidly among the other workers that Clara and I would be out together the night of the big fraternity dance at Simpson.

Wednesday evening after work, we had another plant football game. Paul Young, Dick Fargo, Beverly and I drove in ole Jessie over to Highway 69 in Ankeny to a restaurant before the game.

"I hear you're taking Clara to the movies," she said cheerfully.

"Boy, a guy sure can't have any privacy."

"Well, everybody knows."



We drove off to the football game. In the earlier games I found that carrying the football in the shoes I had worked in all day caused me to slip on the grass. I liked sweeping the right end barefooted, cutting left sharply and racing past the opposing players. It worked well in this game, too, but adequate blocking was still lacking. We lost to another ordnance plant team by a touchdown.

*October 21, Wed.:*

Bob & I didn't get along so good since he knowing my every move - somehow! Knew yesterday I wanted to go to the dance. I phoned to get him in an extra special mood & then tell him. But he already knew it. After work, Paul, Dick, Bob and I went over to Ankeny to eat, then the ball game. And got beat again & a few were hurt. Bob took off his shoes & I was afraid he'd get hurt, too. After the game we went out to Johnson. Anyway we talked dance & all over & it's OK if I go but no kissing!

I love Bob & know in my heart I could never marry another & be really happy. Stayed all night with Grinny.

"Grinny," Frances Sandegren, a blue-eyed honey blond slightly taller than Beverly, was her Tri-Delt sorority sister at Simpson.

Friday evening I drove into Ames from the farm in old Jessie and picked up Beverly and Edythe. The three of us drove to the Iowa State College campus where Beverly looked up Pat Kern, her friend and the sister of a young man Beverly had dated at Simpson.

*October 23, Fri.:*

Stayed all night with Edythe. Her sister was out of town. She's going with me tomorrow night with Dan Syak. We had dinner & Bob came over afterwards. We went out to the college & got Pat after asking about 5 dorms including the Navy's training station trying to reach her. Promised Bob I wouldn't kiss Max. It'll be hard but I won't either.

*October 24, Sat.:*

Worked over at the new building - horrible. Bob said he'd like to be transferred. He liked it. He asked Clara to the show. I asked him what he planned to do about the birthday present & he wouldn't tell me. After I promised not to kiss Max, too. It isn't fair. All he'd have to say was no if you won't I won't.

Danced all the dances with Max. He wanted to take me to D. M. afterwards, but I wouldn't go. Bob wouldn't like it. He (Max) even promised not to drink. But, we'd have stayed up practically all night. Doubt if Max ever asks me back.



Clara and I enjoyed an evening at the movies, stopping at the Hi Ho restaurant for a snack afterwards. We had plenty to talk about since we knew so many of the same people at work. When we arrived at her house she entered through the back door. I followed her into the kitchen. I knew she lived with her mother. I saw no one so assumed her mother had gone to bed. We stood and talked a few minutes. I realized that if I was going to kiss her the time had arrived. I refrained. We merely exchanged good-byes. I went out the back door to old Jessie and drove home. I couldn't help thinking of Beverly.

I was at work ahead of our 8:00 a.m. starting time on Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>. I got in the time clock line, noticing Beverly and Edythe a good distance ahead of me. She turned to look back, melting me with that warm Beverly Barringer smile. I managed a stern appearance, hoping she would quickly assure me there had been no kissing the night before. She waited for me. Edythe walked on ahead. I clocked in and we walked together over near the conveyor where she packed shells. She cheerfully made small talk. She walked to the far side of the conveyor.

"You kissed him," I accused, "didn't you?"

The conveyor was now between us. She turned to look back at me but did not answer.

"I know you did!"

"Hell to you!" she said defiantly.

I turned abruptly and walked away thinking how naïve she had sounded, not even knowing how to cuss properly. I knew she really meant, "To hell with you!" After months of exchanging smiles with Beverly across the conveyors I suddenly avoided looking in her direction. The freeze was on.

Paul was always ready with a humorous remark. I made sure that if she glanced in my direction she would see me laughing and having a good time. I struck up brief conversations with Clara at every opportunity, getting off funny remarks so Beverly could see the two of us enjoying ourselves.

#### *October 25, Sun.:*

*Got up early & Ralph brought us back. Spoke to Bob as sweetly as possible & I was ignored at the time clock & it really hurt so I think turn about is fair play & ignore him the rest of the day. I really believe he had a better time than I did, that's what gets me. I keep thinking horrible thoughts that he likes Clara best. I don't know why I act this way. It makes me feel terrible.*

*Now I'm not sorry for anything I did. It was what I didn't do I was sorry for.*

After a long night with little sleep, agonizing over the rift between Beverly and me, I greeted Monday morning with dismay. It was our day off. Beverly normally made highly interesting and enjoyable plans for those precious days away from the plant. I felt so lost on that Monday, thinking constantly of



Beverly and fearing I may well have lost her forever. I busied myself driving Mom to town for groceries and repairing old Jessie.

I didn't know how much time I had before being called in the military draft. I had attempted to enlist in the army air corps, but was told enlistments were closed and to await the draft, then apply for aviation cadet training after being drafted.

I hated wasting a moment of those precious last days. Jessie and Millie had gone out of their way to schedule the same day of the week off for Beverly and me. With her I had enjoyed the most beautiful moments I had ever experienced. I loved being a part of her enchanting world

Beverly was living at home in Pleasantville. Some weeks back we had agreed to have pictures taken by professional photographers for exchanging. I had promised her one of me as part of her birthday present. Her proofs were to be ready. Being our day off I should be driving to Pleasantville to look at her picture proofs then go to a movie, visit friends or become involved in one or more of her zillion interesting suggestions. At least not making the trip down there would save rationed gas. Oh, God, I thought, I'll be suffering those dreadful feelings during the night. And I couldn't tell anybody. I always kept my personal affairs to myself, never revealing a thing to friends, my mother or brothers and sisters.

Beverly mentioned Pleasantville people unknown to me in her diary.

*October 26, Mon.:*

*Day off - & I had to get up early because Mr. Plumer came to work on the house. Grace Stringfellow passed away last night. It certainly was a shock to everyone.*

*Went to Des Moines. Really felt dressed up in my new coat. Got material to fix my room over. Cost \$15 nearly & I haven't even bought my set of drawers. Sorta thought Bob would come but he never, can't blame him.*

At work Tuesday morning Beverly waited for me at the time clock. She had already clocked in. I clocked in. She handed me her picture proofs. I handed them back to her without a word and walked away.

Paul Young and I exchanged creative humor as we worked through the day. I occasionally sneaked a quick glance at Beverly without her knowing. She sat packing shells into the small boxes that came to her by conveyor. She looked so sullen without that warm smile.

*October 27, Tues.:*

*I tried to be nice to Bob & show him the pictures but without a word he handed them back so again I put forth a blue day. I can't stand it! My stomach feels hollow & there's a lump in my throat & then when I'm home I feel good again. Listened to radio & wrote Bob a letter. May never give it to him - too proud I guess but I've just got to make up. I love him & can't go on this way.*



Another sleepless night. The stomach pangs seemed to affect my entire body. I no longer looked forward to working. I got up and drove to the plant anyway, barely arriving on time. I didn't see Beverly in line at the time clock. After making my way through the line and clocking in I walked toward my workstation. Standing beside the conveyor that brought Paul and me the bullet boxes the girls packed was Beverly. I quickly glanced at her then away. She appeared quite glum. She extended her left hand as I walked past her. In it was a small white envelope.

"Please . . . read this," she said pleadingly.

I grasped the envelope and continued to my workstation across from Paul, sliding it into my right rear pocket so neither he nor anyone else could see it.

I worked steadily for a couple hours. If Beverly had been watching she would never have detected my anxiety to open her envelope. About the time of morning she and I ordinarily met at the water fountain I asked Paul to take over for me. I walked casually past the conveyor, out to the hallway and north to the men's room.

Once in the men's room I quickly removed the envelope, tore an end open, pulled out the fragrant small white page, quickly unfolded it and read. Her brief message commenced with highlights of her recent activities. The last few lines were of great interest. "I want to talk things over. I'll be home alone this evening. Could you please come by about eight o'clock?"

I suddenly feared what she might want to tell me. So many things ran through my mind. Perhaps she wanted to tell me in person that we were through for good and that she intended to continue dating others. Most likely, then she would say we could still be friends. I thought it would be like her to let a person down as easily as possible. That would be the way she would leave it, I thought. She would probably wish me well in the service.

I replaced the note into the envelope, folded the envelope, tucked it deep into my rear pants pocket and returned to work. I avoided looking in Beverly's direction. Paul took his break. The day wore on. Neither Beverly nor I spoke a word to each other all day. It got close to 4:00 p.m. I tore a piece of pasteboard from a bullet carton and jotted a quick note on it. "I'll try to make it at eight." I folded the pasteboard. When Jessie made her rounds to check the work Paul and I were turning out I handed it to her.

"For Beverly I assume," Jessie said.

"Oh, yeah."

At 4:00 p.m., I rushed to clock out as Beverly and her friends made their way toward the time clock. I hurried north down the hallway and out of the building. At home I wasn't hungry at suppertime, but did sit down with the family and ate a bit. I told Mom I had to drive to Pleasantville that evening. I felt she could see through me and knew something was wrong.

"I assume you'll be in late," she said routinely.

"I guess."

In Ames I stopped at Fall Inn for gas, going inside for a couple of almond



Hershey candy bars and a roll of Lifesavers, each costing five cents.

It had been a sunny day with few clouds in the sky. The evening of Wednesday, October 28, 1942 was warm. As I usually did on that long trip I ate the candy bars as I drove and slipped a lifesaver in my mouth before arriving at the Bare residence in Pleasantville. The sun had gone down. The front door was open. As I walked from the car I heard the living room radio through the screen door. The network announcer introduced "Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge."

Beverly met me at the front door.

"Come in," she said quietly. "Kay Kyser's on the radio."

"Oh, yeah," I replied, entering and taking a seat. "I like Kay Kyser."

Beverly sat in a chair a few feet away. We sat in silence listening to the fine big band music for about twenty minutes. During a commercial Beverly stood up.

"They'll be home soon," she said, referring to her aunt and uncle.

As I stood I feared she may tell me quickly what she had to say and I would be on my way home.

"Could we take a ride somewhere?" she asked quietly.

"Sure," I said.

She walked over and turned the radio off. I walked to the front door and stepped outside, holding the screen door open. She followed. We walked to the car. I opened the right front door. She got in and I closed the door. I hurried around behind the car and opened the driver's side door. I got in and started the motor.

It was getting dark. I pulled the button on the dashboard. The faint headlights came on, barely showing the way ahead.

"Where to?" I asked.

"Well . . . just drive on north here to the highway, why don't you?" Already headed north I pulled old Jessie away from the side of the street and drove straight ahead, stopping at the highway.

"Turn left here . . . then right at the corner filling station up there."

I followed her directions, heading north and out of town on a gravel road. After we crossed the railroad tracks I could see we were driving into the wooded countryside

"On the right up there is a lane."

I slowed old Jessie down and turned into the lane. Most of the summer leaves were still on the trees. I drove to a wide opening in the forest and pulled ole Jessie off onto a grassy area beside the lane. I turned the motor off and reached into the back seat for a blanket.

It was dark in the woods. The two of us spread the blanket on the grass and sat down on it, both facing north. Neither spoke for several minutes. We could see the stars above through the tree leaves. We sat silently on the blanket, legs pulled upward and arms clasped around our knees.

"Well," said Beverly very softly, "who's going to start?"

"Your note said you wanted to talk to me," I answered mechanically.



"Yes. Yes I do," she said in a strained voice, then turning to face me,  
"But I want you to talk, too. Please don't just sit there and freeze me out, Bob. I can't stand it any more."

Her voice told me she was forcing tears back.

"All right," I said softly. "I'll talk about anything you want."

We sat momentarily in stony silence.

"Well," she commenced. "I wish I'd never been invited to that dance. I didn't have a good time."

Beverly hesitated. I realized she expected me to say something. I remained silent, dropping back to lie on the blanket.

"I thought of you all that night," she continued. "The others were going to Des Moines after the dance and they wanted me to go. I don't know what time we would've gotten home. But I didn't go. I knew you wouldn't want me to. That's why. I was thinking of you, Bob. I really was."

I felt this to be the most important moment of my life. I had to restrain my natural tendency to blurt out spontaneously. Saying the wrong thing, something that could never be taken back, would be disastrous. My words had to be measured. Beverly waited for me speak.

"We hit it off so well," I said, "right from the start."

"Oh, yes."

I waited for her to proceed. She waited for me to continue.

"I . . . I probably should've told ya . . . long before . . . but . . . I was never sure I could say it right."

"Say what, Bob?"

I hesitated.

"We've always told each other everything."

"Well . . . being with you." I halted, swallowed, then began again. "It's just been the most wonderful time I've ever had. Even when things didn't go right . . . when we drove to Adair and your dad already gone . . . and the time we went to Simpson and Marilyn had already left."

"Those things sure weren't your fault."

"I was glad I could be with you through everything. And it made me so happy meeting your friends . . . and Uncle Lloyd and Aunt Fern."

"I think you have the best friends I've ever met."

"I've enjoyed going with you to the movies you pick and . . . so many, many things." I paused, then said, "I never wanted it to end."

"Me either," she whispered.

"I fooled myself into thinking I was in first place with you. Then I suddenly realized I wasn't. I knew I had to drop out completely."

She grasped my hands in hers.

"Oh, Bob," she said softly. "I'd never want you to drop out!"

"I can't go on that way, though . . . knowing I'm not in first place with you."

"You are in first place with me, Bob. There's nobody else. Not any more."



I pulled her close and kissed her. Her arms slipped around my shoulders. I leaned her back to rest on the blanket. I dropped to lie beside her. We gazed up through the tree branches to see the stars.

"I just couldn't stand it when you didn't even want to talk to me. I've never felt so . . . it was just . . . terrible."

"For me too. I just couldn't be with you or talk to you. I kept thinking of you with someone else. I knew I had misled myself."

"I'm in love with you. Bob"

I rose above her, propped up by one elbow and leaned down to kiss her again.

"I've missed you so," she said.

"I love you!"

I had finally said it. I pressed my lips to hers. All nervousness had subsided. Her warm soft lips eagerly pressed against mine. We soon relaxed in each other's arms. Her kiss had returned to the warm electric emotional sensation I had craved. I had never felt so comfortable.

I finally pulled away and rolled back to lie beside Beverly. We were both facing upward once more, watching the blinking stars through the tree leaves above.

"I don't think I could go on living without you," she said in a whisper. "I know I could never go on the way it's been."

"Me either, Beverly."

She rolled over to look down at me, her left hand clasping my right shoulder.

"I couldn't stand thinking I wasn't in first place with you," I said softly.

"You are in first place with me, now. And you always will be."

Our lips met. She finally pulled back and nestled beside me on the blanket.

"I've never felt so complete," I whispered. "Will you come to see me when I go in the service?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I will! I will! We'll find a way to be together!" She paused, then whispered, "I hate this old war."

I only experienced that "complete" feeling with Beverly. The war that had brought us together posed untold uncertainty.

*I haven't written in my diary for so long. I'll try & condense a few happenings & try to start writing in it again faithfully. I don't know how, when or why but I'm now really in love for the first time. With Bob, he's not what I planned for but I love him. One time I think I fell in love with him at the railroad.*

*Bored again the night we were mad, I owed him a dozen kisses & wouldn't pay, on my birthday. But I grew into it and was sure of it after my date with Max & Bob came up the next Wed. I went to a Lambda Chi party with Max. Max has caused trouble with three boyfriends altogether now.*



## CHAPTER 4

On payday I stopped by the Coast-to-Coast store on the north side of Main Street in Ames where I bought a small brown "Coronado" table model radio. We didn't have electricity on the farm. An old car radio powered by a 6-volt battery, often run down, had been used in the northeast corner of the house. It hadn't worked for some time. Paul and I used to listen to sporting events on that old car radio. Dutch Reagan was sportscaster at WHO, the powerful Des Moines radio station. We were interested in Iowa state football and players such as Heileman, Bach and Kischer. One Saturday night Paul and I spied blond curly haired Everett Kischer at a campus town theater. We struck up a conversation about the game he had played that day and were thrilled talking to him and other players.

From Iowa City in 1939, we listened to play-by-play reports of Iowa University's "Iron Men," when most of the players were on the field for the full sixty minutes, playing both offense and defense. We admired number 24, Nile Kinnick, who appeared to be unrestricted in what he could accomplish as ball carrier, passer and kicker. That year he won 12 awards, including the Maxwell Award and Heisman trophy.

A host of younger brothers and sisters gathered around as I attached the two smaller cylindrical telephone batteries, each about 3" in diameter and 9" tall, to the radio and hiding them behind it. I turned the radio switch on and tuned to WOI. The station's transmitter tower was about a mile away. After a few minutes the new radio warmed up and strains of big band music swept through the house. Mom no longer had to rely upon my crystal set for music and news.

I had paid her little by little until the \$25 I borrowed for buying old Jessie was paid in full. She genuinely appreciated old Jessie at the time of her dad's death that year. She and I made the trip to Corydon, 17 miles south of Chariton near the Missouri border, for the funeral then east to New York cemetery for the burial. It commenced to rain on the way home that night.

"Old Jessie purrs right along in this rain," I said.

"Dad always said the rain makes the valves seat better." She said.

When we approached the driveway running southeast from in front of our house, old Jessie's steering wheel stuck due to the bent tie rod, forcing us into the ditch just east of the driveway. Mom sat silently as I backed out of the ditch, pulled hard on the steering wheel to get past the sticking point and drove up in front of the house.



From the time I got Jessie, she had served as a workhorse, running errands such as trips to town for groceries, getting me to work and back six days a week and providing transportation for the hundreds of miles Beverly and I traveled.

I concentrated on having a professional photo made. Beverly had selected one of herself from proofs we viewed. Besides the picture for her I needed one for my family since I would soon be leaving for the service.

First came the selection of a new suit. One evening after work I stopped at Don Beam Clothiers on the south side of Main Street in Ames where Smiley, Bob, Paul and I knew we were getting the best. Don Beam, the owner, was a middle aged black haired brown-eyed man who stood about 5' 10", weighing around 165 pounds. He appeared to be alone in the store when I entered, standing at the cash register doing some figuring. A yellow measuring tape hung around his neck over the suit coat.

"Good evening, Don," I said cheerfully. "I'd like to look at suits."

"Well, Bob, we'll see what we have."

He stepped out from behind the counter.

"Are you still throwing your voice?" Don asked routinely as he led me to the back of the store.

"I've been pretty busy with other work lately," I said.

He took a few measurements with his tape then pointed to the proper area of the suit rack for me to look.

"Your size would be along in here."

I searched. One immediately caught my eye. I pointed to a beige colored suit featuring diagonal ribs. Don gently lifted the suit coat from the hanger and helped me on with it. I stood before the 3-way mirror. The coat fit as if it had been tailored for me. He handed me a pair of pants from the hanger. I went into the dressing room and changed into them. I folded the pant cuffs up to keep them from dragging on the floor and came out, stood before the mirrors and looked at the suit as it appeared on me. I was thrilled, even with the pants folded at the bottom.

"This is the last we'll be getting of this quality material," Don said authoritatively, standing behind me with his hands grasping the ends of the yellow tape. "The mills are turning out goods for the military now, you know. I doubt if we ever see material of this quality again. It has two pair of pants. We'll tailor the pants to fit," he went on. "Now, they're cuffless . . . new wartime regulations."

"What'd ya say, Don?" I asked. "Cuffless?"

"Cuffless . . . no cuffs on pants anymore. Saves a little cloth, I guess."

"I really want this suit!" I said, as if I may be deprived of purchasing it.

"There'll be some trimmings from the pants. You'll have repairing material in case you ever need it."

Don took the waist and inseam measurements. I went back into the dressing room and changed into my work pants. When I came out Don was waiting on another customer in the front of the store. As I was hanging the



pants and coat back on the hanger, I heard the ring of the cash register. Don concluded his business with the customer who went out the door. I carried the suit on its hanger to the front of the store and draped it over the counter beside the cash register.

"I can pay you half today and the rest next payday."

"Where are you working, Bob?"

"Ordnance plant," I replied.

"Will you be going into the service?"

"Yep . . . any time now. Like a lotta other guys I'm just waitin' to hear from the draft board. Oh, I need a tie."

Don followed me over to a necktie display at the center of the store. I sorted through a number of ties on a rotating rack, picked out a brown one and handed it to him. He went to the counter and hung the tie over the suit pants.

"They say a lot of the boys'll be called up before Christmas," Don said. "We're sure going to miss you guys around here! Now, Bob, if you need more time to pay the balance, just let me now. Your suit will be ready late next week."

"I'll need it before then. I'm havin' a picture taken Thursday."

"In that case stop in late Wednesday. It should be ready."

"Thanks, Don"

I stopped by Wednesday after work. The suit was ready. The photography appointment was for 5:00 p.m. in Ames the next evening. I would take the suit to the plant; change into it after work and drive to Ames.

That morning I removed the suit from the closet, leaving one pair of the pants on another hanger. I carried the suit on its hanger down from my upstairs room and placed it on the dining room table. Mom brought the freshly pressed white shirt in from the kitchen. A number of the kids gathered around. I removed the suit coat from the hanger and slipped the shirt on the hanger over the pants.

"Bob, that is a fine looking suit," said Mom.

Mom picked up the suit coat, nestling the lower edge to her cheek.

"Such good material and ribbed, too. "

"I hate to tell ya what it cost."

"Well . . . you'll have something real nice to wear when this is over."

She handed me the coat. I had to pull it away from the extended sticky hands of the kids. I slipped the coat onto the hanger over the shirt, hurried with it to old Jessie and headed for the plant.

After work I changed into the white shirt, suit and chocolate brown necktie which I tied in a Windsor knot. I drove to Ames for the photo appointment that warm sunny fall evening.

After leaving the photography studio I walked along Main Street toward my car. An old truck pulled into the curb just ahead of me near the Maid-Rite Café at the east end of Main Street. I recognized the truck as George Grider's. Wearing work clothes George stepped out of the truck.



"Hi, Bob!"

"George . . . whaddya up to?"

"Are ya still workin' at the plant?" George asked.

"Oh, yeah."

"I applied down there."

"Oh, good!"

"Well . . . might as well work 'til I'm called. My work's been so hit 'n miss. Military's takin' a lotta the construction materials."

"Oh, that's right, too." I replied. "Did I tell ya . . . a while back I went down to enlist in the air corps. They told me enlistments were closed. Have to wait til I'm drafted."

"Yeah, I got in just ahead of that closing deadline. Once you're through basic training you can apply for cadets."

"Yeah . . . that's what they said," I agreed. "Well . . . see ya at the plant, George."

"Okay . . . gotta pick up some oil at Coast-to-Coast. See ya down there."

I continued east along the sidewalk toward my car. George walked west.

Airmen wore silver wings at the upper left side of the military blouse. Two of the popular songs that fall were "He Wears A Pair of Silver Wings" and "Silver Wings in the Moonlight." George and I looked forward to the day we'd sport our silver wings.

At the plant Clara assumed the position of Assistant Manager. Just to do something different Beverly and I decided to spend a night in old Jessie. We had spent most of the night there the night we ran out of gas along the Roland road the time we double-dated with Smiley and Pauline.

She told her aunt not to expect her home one night. After getting off work at midnight I drove to 46<sup>th</sup> Street in Des Moines, parking on the street near my Uncle Roy's residence. We got in the back seat, under a blanket, and talked and talked. The next morning we drove to the Hi-Ho Restaurant for breakfast. We used the rest rooms there to clean up, comb our hair and brush our teeth. After breakfast we drove west on Euclid to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, then north, the back way to the plant.

We had a break halfway through each shift referred to as "recess." Most of the workers gathered on the concrete front porch of Building Four at the 6:00 p.m. recess, then after "lunch" around 8:00 p.m. and again for recess at 10:00 p.m. Many lit up and smoked. When we could without offending anyone, Beverly and I moved away from the crowd in the pitch darkness around 10:00. We held each other close and sneaked warm soft kisses for a few precious fleeting moments before we had to go back inside to work.

One night a group from the plant went to the small Toll House fast food restaurant, then to Sally's where a number of us spent the night. There weren't enough beds, so Sally located a small mattress. I grabbed one end. She carried the other.

"Where does this go?" I asked.

"In the bathtub," Sally said.



Sally walked backward to the bathroom. I followed. Beverly followed us.

We swung the mattress to fit neatly in the bathtub. Sally left and returned with a blanket.

"Now you guys have a place to sleep," she said.

Beverly and I, fully clothed, slept on the mattress in Sally's bathtub. The next morning we all boarded old Jessie for work. What breakfast we had was picked up at the plant cafeteria.

One morning at work Russell Kauffman, the little black mustache on his upper lip bobbing as he spoke, commenced telling other workers that he expected to be called into the army soon so would be selling his car. He had a 1931 4-door light green Chevy.

"I'll be leavin' soon myself," I said to Russ. "But, I'd like to see that car of yours."

"Sure, R. J. . . . you can look at it anytime."

Beverly and I met at the water fountain. Of course she had also heard that Russ intended to sell his car.

"That car of Russ's has a radio and heater," I said. "Old Jessie doesn't have a heater and I'd sure like to have a car with a radio."

"Oh, Bob . . . I'd really miss old Jessie."

"Me, too."

"Besides, R. J. . . . it'd take some money, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know how much I'd need. Russ isn't leavin' right away."

Beverly and I realized there wasn't much time before I would be called. Then, too, as she expressed, many of us had developed a sentimental attachment to old Jessie. I felt that even Paul Young, who we continued to call "Hope," and who constantly invented snide remarks about her, had his own peculiar crush on old Jessie. I also thought my mother secretly admired the old girl.

Flowing through my mind was the glowing prospect of riding in a warm car during cold weather and listening to big band music as I drove. Of course, I constantly visualized Beverly at my side, a thrilling concept.

I looked at Russ's '31 Chevy. The way it started up immediately proved it had a good battery. The motor ran quietly and smoothly. He assured me the car did not use oil. The tires were nearly new. The heater worked fine and so did the radio. It was a clean well-maintained vehicle.

"How much do ya hafta to have for it?" I asked Russell.

"Ninety-five dollars."

"Whew! I can't do that."

I informed Beverly the price of Russ's car was beyond my means at the moment. I started saving up, still thinking I may buy Russ's car.

I drove Beverly to Knoxville, about nine miles southeast of Pleasantville, one afternoon before going to work. I met her younger sister, Marilyn, a black haired blue-eyed eighteen year-old an inch or so shorter than Beverly. "Shorty," as she was known, lived with an aunt, another sister of the girls' mother. Marilyn's sparkling blue "Galvin" eyes were so like Beverly's.



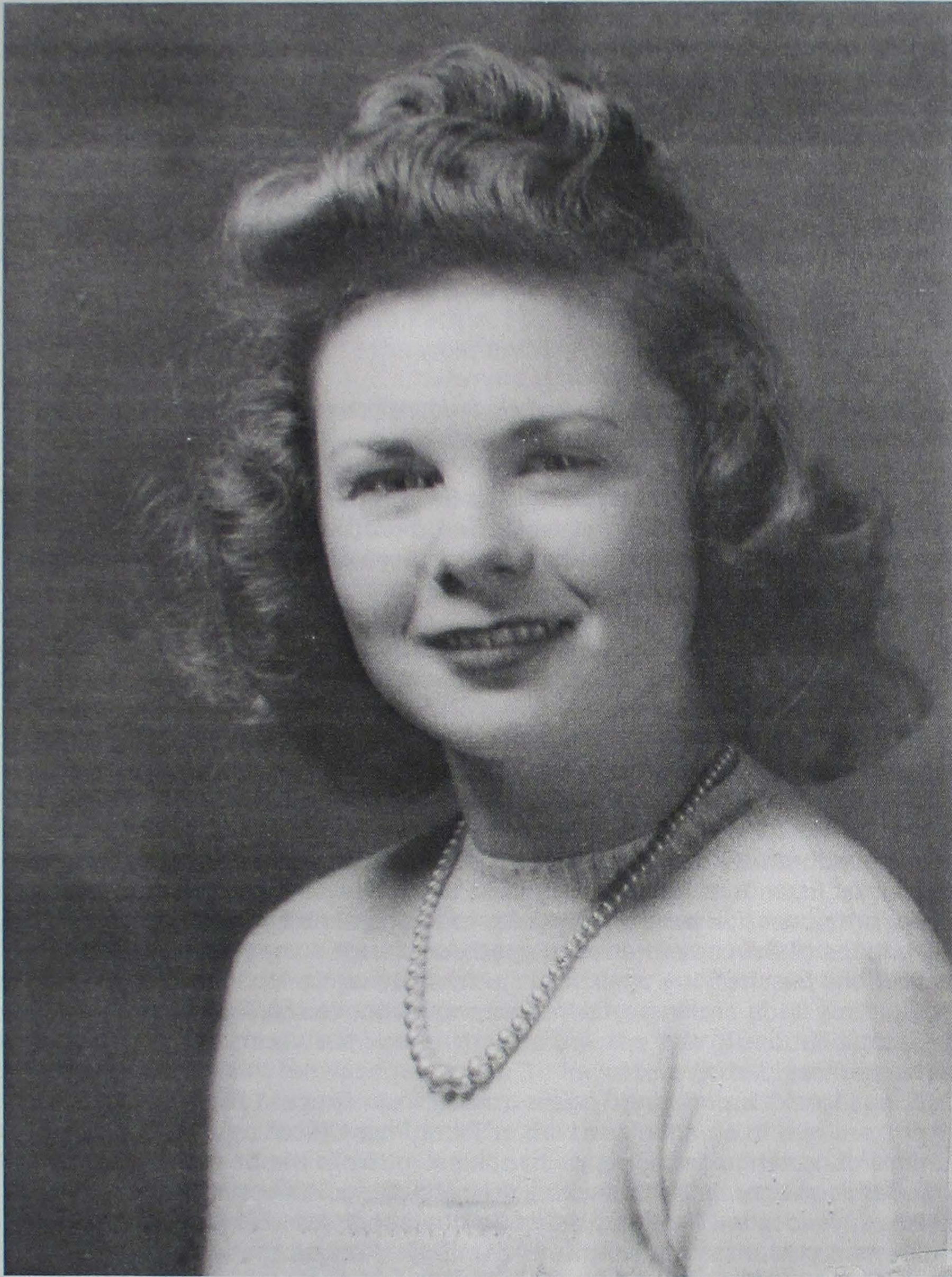
I picked up my portraits from the photographer's in Ames. Beverly and I exchanged pictures. I gave one to Mom who placed it on the piano she played at times in the living room. It stood among other family pictures.



HART STUDIO

AME





**Beverly Ann Barringer, Fall, 1942.**



We had gone back to the day shift, getting off work at 4:00 p.m. One sunny fall afternoon as the shift ended George Grider stopped by to see me. Beverly and I were on our way to clock out. I stopped to speak to George. She went on ahead with her girl friends down the hall to the time clock. George told me he had started to work, explaining he had been assigned to what he considered a lowly type of work in the new building south of ours. He had attended Iowa State a quarter and was unhappy that our employer, U. S. Rubber Company, had overlooked his chemistry knowledge.

"Well," I asked, "where did you want to work?"

"I expected to be assigned to the unit where the gunpowder is mixed. Something like that."

"Can't ya ask 'em to switch ya?"

"Naw . . . I won't be here long, anyway."

Beverly and our friends, having clocked out, were standing behind me talking among themselves.

"If you're headin' for Ames," he said, "I'll meet ya up there."

I gestured toward the guys and gals behind me.

"A bunch of us are goin' to Des Moines. I gotta clock out."

"Okay . . . see ya later," George said, hurrying north down the hall.

"Is he a friend of yours?" Beverly asked.

"Yes . . . from Ames. He just started to work in the new building."

"Why didn't you ask him to come with us?" Beverly asked.

I looked down the hall. George had reached the door.

"Oh, I guess I could have."

I hurried south down the hall and clocked out, then caught up with Beverly and the gang for the trip to Des Moines.

Bruce wrote Mom from sunny California. Tyrone Power, a famed motion picture star, was in boot training with him at San Diego. I realized that not only Bruce, but also Paul and I, would be overseas where mail censors would prevent us from divulging our locations.

My brain went to work. I created a code and sent it with detailed instructions to Bruce before he shipped out. I kept a copy of the code instructions for checking against his letters. He wrote Mom that he had received my code and instructions. He was about to ship out but had no idea of his destination. It was widely known the marines were battling the Japs in the south Pacific.

It was weeks before word again arrived from Bruce. I Finally received a letter from him in an envelope with a "Fleet Post Office" return address. A number of rectangular segments had been cut from the pages. I first thought a mail censor may have applied his scissors after discovering Bruce had revealed his location by using the code I had sent him. If his letter did contain a coded message in spite of the clipped pages the words "Iowa cornfields" would appear, alerting me that a coded message was contained in that paragraph.



His letter commenced, "It's been a long time since I saw those Iowa cornfields." I knew the rest of the code followed. I was to look for capitalized letters. The second line read, "Sergeant Autry Gene is now in uniform." News of Gene Autry, famous singing cowboy recording and film star, entering the army as a sergeant had been widespread. How smart of Bruce, I thought, to encode a subject recently in the news so as not to arouse the suspicion of a censor. I made a mental note of the letters, "SAG" and looked for additional coded words. The next sentence read, "Sergeant Autry Gene will win our battles now." He had repeated "SAG." I was baffled.

I hurried to the Ames library, obtained a world atlas and turned to a page showing the islands of the South Pacific. I searched for anything with "SAG" in it and soon spied a town at the west end of New Britain Island named "Sagsag."

Mail sent overseas from the states was not censored. I wrote to Bruce immediately letting him know I had deciphered his letter to reveal the town named "Sagsag" on the west end of New Britain, the largest island in the Bismarck Archipelago, located northwest of New Guinea. I included instructions for a new code system I had devised.

This one was based on football, a popular subject among young men. My hope was that such a common subject would not arouse suspicion of the censors. From a page of the library atlas I had traced the South Pacific islands inside the squares formed by parallels and meridians and had given each square a name.

I explained in my directions to Bruce that the squares containing islands represented football fields running north and south. Crossing the squares east and west at the halfway point was a fifty-yard line, giving each square a north and south half. To alert me a code was to follow Bruce would first write the word, "football," followed closely by the name of the square containing the island he was on at the time. Then he would indicate whether he was on an island at the upper or lower half of the square by stating "north" or "south." Of course, there were fifty imaginary yard lines in each half square, north and south, so he could indicate the approximate yard line crossing his island east and west. To pinpoint his precise location on that yard line Bruce was to indicate positions of football linemen. To designate a point to the left of center on a particular yard line Bruce would write "left guard," "left tackle" or "left end" or a point between positions. To indicate a certain point along a yard line to the right of center he would mention "right guard," "right tackle" or "right end" or a point between positions on the right side of the line.

I included an example of the new code using the square I had named "Paul" containing the island of New Britain and pinpointing Sagsag. I heard from Bruce a few weeks later. His airmail letter had been censored severely. Buried a ways down in the letter I read, "Remember the football game we played against Paul out on the north forty? He carried the ball to the 20 yard line where I nailed him between left guard and tackle."



The word "football" alerted me that Bruce had encoded his location. I hurried to my desk and got out the tracing paper with the South Pacific islands I had drawn from the atlas. "Paul" told me which square to check. "North" indicated his island was in the upper half of that square. I gauged a short distance down from the top of the square to the imaginary twenty-yard line and zeroed in between left guard and left tackle, pinpointing Rabaul, New Britain's capital, on the northeast tip of the island – just west of New Ireland.

I wasted no time writing to Bruce with my decoding finding and explained that I would apply that football encoding system to let him know where I went when I was sent overseas.

Beverly selected "Mrs. Miniver," a widely publicized new movie, for us to see. It was showing at the Grand Theater in Des Moines. We sat in one of the front rows. I took her hand and ran the tips of her fingers across my lips. I thoroughly enjoyed the sensation and she didn't seem to mind. She told me later that technique thrilled her.

Driving home, I kept my left hand on the steering wheel and my right arm draped over shoulders, holding her close to me as usual. Many of the songs of the day seemed to have been written just for us, such as "At Last," a big Glenn Miller recording so popular that fall. I sang these words:

"At last my love has come along.  
My lonely days are over  
And life is like a song.  
At last the skies above are blue.  
My heart was wrapped in clover  
The night I looked at you.  
I found a dream that I could speak to.  
A dream that I could call my own.  
I found a thrill to press my cheek to  
A thrill I've never known.  
You smiled and then the spell was cast.  
Now here we are in heaven  
For you are mine at last."

Beverly may have slept through my singing along with the big band renditions, but still I directed many of the words to her. Even "String of Pearls," a Glenn Miller instrumental so popular during the fall of '42, written and arranged by a young musician named Jerry Gray, had been given a lyric.

It was late in the fall. The mornings were crisp and cold. Starting old Jessie became trickier. I had to pull out the choke and at times even crank her to get the motor started. After it was started the choke had to be adjusted manually to keep the motor running until it was warm, then the choke had to be shoved back against the dashboard to prevent the carburetor from flooding and killing the motor. Old Jessie's muffler was noisy again. Getting under her on the cold hard ground and working with bare hands against cold metal was painful. But I had to wire pieces of asbestos covered by split tin cans around the muffler. And, of course, the brakes



required attention from time to time, calling for crawling under old Jessie to do the repair work. Riding in a cold car with frigid breezes shooting up through cracks in the floorboards was exceptionally discomforting. By the time I had driven from home to the plant on those cold mornings my hands and feet were nearly frozen.

We were well into the nationally regulated system of gasoline rationing before the 50-gallon drum on the front porch was empty. The "hoarded" gas had taken a lot of people many miles in old Jessie. Working at the ordnance plant entitled me to a "C" ration card. A "C" sticker was displayed in the lower right corner of Jessie's windshield, enabling persons pumping gas at filling stations to compare the "C" card with that on the windshield sticker. I removed the empty drum from the front porch finally pleasing my mother.

I no longer felt right taking Beverly places in a cold car. Russell Kauffman expected to be called into the service at any time. Our discussions concerning my buying his car had gotten as far as him considering taking old Jessie as partial payment on his '31 Chevy. He would only have to suffer in a cold car a few minutes for the short drives between Des Moines and Ankeny and would be in the army soon. He finally allowed me twenty dollars for old Jessie. In addition he needed \$75 cash. I had managed to save \$55. I hated to do it, but I finally asked Beverly if she could lend me the remaining \$20. I realized she had obligations and goals for the Christmas season, so I assured her I would get the money back to her as soon as possible. Beverly loaned me \$20. I bought Russ's car. I never did name it. I drove old Jessie to the plant one morning and exchanged cars with Russ. That way, Beverly and I agreed, we really hadn't lost old Jessie as she was still in the DMOP family.

I was so happy to drive a car with a good heater. And having a car radio was a genuine luxury. I relied upon the radio for war news and the world's finest music. Prominent among the popular songs were "There Are Such Things," "My Devotion," "Mister Five By Five," "Skylark," "Dearly Beloved," "You Are Always in My Heart," "Manhattan Serenade," "He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings," "String of Pearls," "Silver Wings In The Moonlight" and "At Last." Glenn Miller had joined the army air corps and took his famous band with him.

Beverly continued living at home in Pleasantville. More people living in that area had gone to work at the plant. She was able to get a ride to work and back with hometown friends. Although a number of the young ladies knew how to drive, very few had cars of their own.

The Pleasantville driver she rode to the plant and home with was to take a day off. She needed a ride to work that day. So, Beverly and I went to a movie in Des Moines the night before, then I drove her home to Pleasantville and spent the night at her place. She showed me up a flight of stairs to a small bedroom where I was to sleep. Beverly left. I crawled into bed. The next thing I heard was Beverly's hushed voice.

"Time to get up, sleepy head."

"Already?" I managed, not fully awake. "What time is it?"



"After six. The bathroom's open. Don't go back to sleep."

"Okay, good lookin'."

"Fresh!" she quipped. "Hurry. We'll be in the kitchen."

I arose, dressed in a sleepy daze and found the bathroom. Going down the stairs I heard Beverly talking to Aunt Fern in the kitchen so followed the sound of their voices over the familiar voice of Bob Burlingame delivering news over the living room radio.

"Good morning, Bob," said Aunt Fern cheerfully. "How did you sleep?"

"Oh, I slept like a log, thanks."

"How do you like your eggs?" she asked.

Aunt Fern pointed to a chair at the far end of a small kitchen table. I walked to it and sat down.

"Oh, over easy . . . or any ole way, really."

Beverly placed half grapefruit in a white china bowl in front of me and handed me a spoon. I commenced eating. In no time Aunt Fern placed a plate with two over-easy eggs and toast in front of me and removed the bowl.

"Thanks. This looks good!"

Aunt Fern left the room. Beverly sat down at the opposite end of the table and finished her breakfast. I ate heartily. Beverly picked up her plate and took it over to the counter next to the sink.

"You go ahead and eat," said Beverly. "I've got to run upstairs."

Beverly left the kitchen and went back upstairs. I quickly finished eating, placed my plate, bowl and silverware on the counter and hurried into the living room. Aunt Fern sat in a rocking chair listening to the big floor model radio as she sewed a button on a white blouse.

"I don't know what to get Beverly for Christmas," I said in a hushed voice.

"Oh, Bob . . . I don't know what to say," Aunt Fern replied softly. "Just about anything, I guess."

"I mean . . . has she mentioned anything? I'd like to get her something she really wants!"

"Well," she answered quietly, glancing toward the doorway as if to make certain Beverly wouldn't hear. "She has spoken of a cedar chest."

"Yes . . . a cedar chest," I said, glancing toward the doorway. "She did mention that one time. If you folks aren't planning to get her one, I'll start looking."

I turned to get my coat from the rack in the corner of the living room.

"No, we didn't plan on that," said Aunt Fern softly. "Do what you like."

We heard Beverly's footsteps on the stairs and turned to see her come through the doorway and over to the coat rack. I stepped over to the rack, removed her coat and helped her on with it. I reached the doorknob and opened the door. Beverly and I turned back to Aunt Fern.

"Thanks," I said, "for everything!"

"You're welcome, Bob," said Aunt Fern. "Now you come back."





**Left: Jessie Wilcox, our manager at DMOP.  
Right: Aunt Fern at Pleasantville, Iowa 1942**



"Thanks! I sure will!"

"Bye," said Beverly.

"Bye-bye," said Aunt Fern.

Beverly and I hurried to the '31 Chevy. It was barely daylight. There was a skiff of snow on the ground. I opened the right front car door for Beverly. She got in. I closed the door, walked around behind the car, got in and closed the door. I turned on the switch and stepped on the starter. The quiet motor started immediately. I pulled away from the side of the street and started for Ankeny. I turned the radio on. A buzzing sound came through the speaker as the tubes warmed. We felt the chill of the crisp cold morning awaiting the car's heater to put out warm air. Soon the radio was playing big band music. We had driven several miles west on Highway 5 before feeling the heater's warmth. Adhering fairly closely to the national 35 mile an hour speed limit, the trip from Pleasantville to Ankeny took about an hour.

The front page of the December 1, 1942 Ames Tribune carried this story:

**42 MEN GET FINAL ORDERS  
END WEEK FURLOUGH FRIDAY**

*Final induction orders for 42 more Story county selective service draftees were issued Monday by the local selective service board office.*

*These men, all of whom passed final physical examinations at Camp Dodge reception center, Des Moines, on Nov. 27<sup>TH</sup>, are to end a one-week furlough at 4:00 a.m. Friday.*

*They will report to the city hall here from where they will leave by bus for the trip back to the reception center to enter army training.*

A penny post card arrived from Uncle Sam commencing, "Greetings." My draft notice had arrived. After talking with Jim Warren, Jeep Wierson, Ken Craig, Eddie Gibb and other Ames guys who had received notices, the consensus was we may leave before Christmas.

The morning after receiving Uncle Sam's greetings, I drove to the plant where I would deliver the news. The car radio played a beautiful rendition of "Skylark" as I cruised along that brisk morning.

Beverly was waiting for me near the time clock. We clocked in and walked north down the hallway toward our workstations.

"I have something to tell you," Beverly said. "You've probably already used your psychic powers . . . one of my dearest friends is leaving for the service. We said goodbye last night. Anyway, he did kiss me. I've told you about Skip.

"Oh, sure . . . Skip . . . your classmate. I understand. Listen, Beverly, I got my draft notice."

"Oh, no! How long do you have?"

"I talked to some of the Ames guys. We hope we're not called 'til after Christmas."

This article appeared on the Tribune's December 3<sup>rd</sup> front page:



**RATIONING BOARD MEMBERS NOMINATED  
For Busiest Men in Town Honors  
Their Job is Day and Night Affair,  
With Little Time Off for Private Life**

*If anyone should ask who are the five busiest men in town; that nomination probably would go to the War Price and Rationing board members.*

*The five are Adolph Shane, Chairman, Mark Morris, Arthur Pose, Wallace Wright and L. B. Spinney and with them the job is a day and night proposition.*

The article went on:

*First on the list are more than 5,000 applications for gasoline rationing ration cards, 20 to 25 percent of which have to be handled more than once through requests for additional allotments.*

*State rationing headquarters estimated that there would be from 600 to 800 applications for fuel oil here, but there were more than 3,000, or four to five times as many as were anticipated.*

*All of these requests for oil have to be acted on individually, with needs of each family, type of home and the previous amount used all having to be considered in each case.*

The Ames Tribune of December 5, 1942 featured this headline:

**BOMBING OFFENSIVE ON SOUTHERN ITALY OPENS**

On Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, one year after "Pearl Harbor" this story appeared:

*Tallahassee, Fla, (UP) A victory ship will be named for the late Captain Colin Kelley, Jr., one of the first American heroes of the war.*

*This freighter will be launched at Mobile, Ala. Next Sunday. It was named by Florida school children during their recent scrap collection campaign. The parents and a sister of the army flier who gave his life in bombing a Jap battleship will be present.*

Another article commemorating the first year since December 7, 1941 bore this headline:

**Jap Attack results in U. S. Mobilizing Its  
Largest Forces of Armed Men in History.**

The Ames Tribune's front page headline for December 9th:

**AMES VOLUNTEERS GET BLACK OUT ORDERS**

**Sirens Will sound Start of 20-Minute test At 10 Monday**

*Detailed instructions have been transmitted to more than 700 volunteers of the Ames Civilian Defense Corps and the city is ready to participate in the regional blackout Monday, Dec. 14, Commander J. H. Ames announced Tuesday night at a meeting of the Defense council.*

*College and city sirens will announce the blackout at 10:00 p.m., Monday and the all-clear signal at 10:20.*



*Property owners will be held responsible for blacking out their property. More than 300 wardens, each responsible for a designated area, will inspect the effectiveness of this test blackout. Wardens in residential areas have agreed to announce their approach by whistle in case it is necessary to summon residents to the door for failure to comply with completed blackout instructions. Wardens will be identified by white armbands.*

### **Traffic Must Stop**

*All traffic will pull to the curb and both motorists and pedestrians instructed to get off the street. Trucks, busses and other through traffic on the main highways will be allowed to proceed with dimmed lights in this practice test, Commander Ames explained. Streetlights and those on the water tower will be out, but the radio tower will be lighted in this test. One or more planes will be over the city to inspect the completeness of the test during the 20 minutes.*

This article concerning our high school coach also appeared in the Ames paper:

### **Lieutenant Wells Leaves For East**

*Lieut. (J.G.) Kenneth Wells left Tuesday for Princeton, N. J., where he will start his naval duties. Wells has been head athletic coach of the Ames High School for the last five years. His commission was signed by Navy Secretary Knox on Armistice Day.*

Payday finally arrived. I received my customary \$36 for one week's work. From that I took a twenty-dollar bill and handed it to Beverly.

"BB Ann, I want you to know how much I appreciate your loan."

"Oh, you're welcome, R. J.," she said. "Now this goes for Christmas presents."

One evening Beverly and I went to a dance at the Riverview Park ballroom in Des Moines. The band played all the latest hits. "White Christmas" had been exceptionally popular for months and was played many times that evening. Beverly and I danced cheek to cheek. I habitually, but quietly, sang lyrics of songs I knew. One time I whistled part of a tune and was stopped. The shrill sound affected Beverly's ear.

That night at Riverview Ballroom I did not whistle, but sang softly. Toward midnight the orchestra again struck up "White Christmas." I sang so only Beverly could hear.

"I'm dreaming of a white Christmas  
Just like the ones I used to know.

Where the treetops glisten  
And children listen

To hear sleigh bells in the snow."

"I'll hear sleigh bells in the snow every time I think of you," Beverly whispered.

I held her close as we danced. Tears welled in my eyes.



"I'll always love you, Beverly. Always."

We glided slowly across the floor with ease and grace. Beautiful memories of the past few months with Beverly drifted through my mind as the melodic strains of "White Christmas" ended and another dreamy song commenced. We shut out the darkness of the unknown that lay ahead. I didn't want the night to end.

During my time off work, I searched furniture stores for the appropriate cedar chest. In a furniture outlet on the south side of Main Street in Ames across the street from the Collegian Theater, a middle aged dark haired lady showed me a number of cedar chests. I compared and compared. One especially caught my eye. It was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  the regular size. I left the store and drove to Des Moines where I looked at more cedar chests. The next day I returned to the Ames store and put a down payment on the one I liked at first. I felt the slightly smaller than normal size was just right for Beverly.

A few days before Christmas Beverly and I had a day off. She planned to shop in Des Moines. There was a fresh layer of snow on the ground. I drove the '31 Chevy from the farm into Ames and parked in front of the furniture store. I trudged through the snow, went inside and paid the balance owed. The saleslady led the way to the small light wood colored cedar chest. She had wrapped it in cellophane. There was a bright red ribbon around it with a huge bow on top. Attached to the ribbon was a little white card. I borrowed a pen and wrote "Beverly, Christmas 1942" on the little card.

The owner, husband of the saleslady, picked up one end of the chest as I grasped the other. The lady hurried to open the front door of the store. We carried the chest through the door and out to the car. I held my end of the chest up with my left hand and arm, opening the left rear car door with my right hand. I raised my end of the chest up on the edge of the back seat, ran around the car and opened the right rear door. We lifted the pretty cedar chest and moved it to the center of the back seat for the trip to Pleasantville.

I arrived at the Bare residence to be met at the door by Aunt Fern. I explained I wanted to deliver the cedar chest while Beverly was away. She offered to help me carry the chest into the house, but I told her I could get it. I went back to the car, opened the right rear door and gently slid the chest out, grasping the center of the lower front edge with my right hand while holding the top with my left. Aunt Fern held the front door open as I moved past her carrying the chest. I placed it on the living room floor directly in front of the well-decorated Christmas tree standing beside the radio.

"I think," said Aunt Fern, pointing, "it could be hidden behind the tree there."

"Oh, sure," I quickly agreed.

I picked up the chest. Aunt Fern tilted the tree toward her, its decorations clinking, making room between it and the wall. I carefully slid the chest along the wall behind the tree. She eased the Christmas tree back to stand straight, hiding the cedar chest.



"I'll make sure she opens her other gifts first," said Aunt Fern. "We'll see if she discovers something behind the tree."

"I hope she's pleased with it," I said. "It's not as big as most."

"It's perfect, Bob."

"Do ya think so?"

"Bob, Beverly will keep that chest all her life. It's a very, very fine gift."

At the plant the next morning Beverly and I clocked in and went directly to work. I figured that if she had discovered her Christmas present she couldn't contain herself and would tell me immediately. She hadn't mentioned it. I thought then there was a good chance it would end up a Christmas morning surprise just as Aunt Fern planned.

It was Dick Fargo's last day at work. He had enlisted in the Coast Guard and was scheduled to commence active duty on the east coast right after Christmas.

Dad returned from Idaho in his red 1937 Chevy pickup. Paul remained out there attending school at Montpelier, a city a few miles north of Dingle.

I spent my last Christmas before leaving for the service, a white Christmas, at home with my family. Mom hung a stocking from the fireplace mantel with my name on a small card pinned to it along with those of the younger brothers and sisters. Mine was at the left end. To the right of mine was a stocking for Marj, 14; Danny, 12; Pat, 11; Phil, 9; Doug, 8; Kay, 5; Gary, 3; and at the right end was a tiny sock for 20 month-old Roger. Santa Claus had filled the larger stockings with oranges, bananas, red and white candy canes, chunks of peanut brittle and a wide variety of nuts.

That evening I drove the '31 Chevy to Pleasantville, eating my usual almond Hershey candy bar on the way and listening to soothing Christmas music from the car radio. Before I reached Pleasantville I slipped a Lifesaver into my mouth. I realized we would have to hurry. Beverly had planned for us to see a movie in Des Moines. I drove up in front of the house. She came out carrying a decoratively wrapped Christmas present. I got out, stepped around the car and opened her door. She got in, still holding the present. I hurried back around the car and got in behind the steering wheel. Beverly sat the present on the floor beside her feet. She threw her arms around me and kissed me briefly.

"Thank you so much!" she exclaimed. "It's just beautiful. Oh, I have something for you."

"I'll have to open it later. We'd better get going."

"Oh, R. J., I just love that cedar chest!"

"I was afraid you may not."

"That's what Aunt Fern said. Very clever . . . sneaking it in when you knew I'd be out shopping . . . hiding it behind the tree."

"Her idea."

"All the other presents had been opened before I spied it back there."

"I was afraid you'd see it before this morning."

She slid her arm around my waist, pulling me to her as I drove.



"Such a pleasant surprise."

In Des Moines we saw the film, "Pride of The Yankees," starring Gary Cooper and Teresa Wright.

After the movie we went to a restaurant. Once we had ordered food I opened my present, a brown leather shaving kit with a small mirror, comb, hairbrush, fingernail file and soap.

"Thanks, BB," I said. "I can sure use this!"

"I thought it was something you'll need wherever you go," she said, and then in a whisper, "I'll write you every day."

"I'll sure look forward to your letters."

Her big blue eyes saddened. She stared down at the table between us.

"It was hard seeing Dick Fargo leave. It's sure going to be different. I can't imagine the place without you guys. You, Dick, Paul, Russ and Herb."

"Do you really think they'll take Herby?"

"You stop that! You guys and your jokes."

We sat silently as a waitress brought two glasses of water. When she left, Beverly reached both hands across the table, inviting my hands to meet hers.

"This old war." She said quietly. "It's so sad. Like the end of that movie tonight."

"Oh, yeah, when Lou was out there on the field sayin' Goodbye."

"I cried."

"I think almost everybody in the theater did."

"You, too?"

"Me, too."

"I thought Babe Ruth was good," she said. "Of course, he played himself."

"Yep. Oh," I chuckled. "I did tell ya about Babe Ruth helpin' start our car last spring, didn't I?"

We pulled our hands back as the waitress returned with our orders.

"Oh, yes. You guys let him think he'd found the trouble."

The next day was Saturday. We had to work. After eating, I drove Beverly home. Every minute seemed so precious. My time was running out.

I kept in touch with the guys who had been in school with me for the latest on when we'd be called up. I started planning on the key things I wanted to do before leaving.

A new two-cent "Victory" stamp honoring the United Nations was announced in the Ames Tribune on Saturday, January 2, 1943. Its design appeared with the notice that the new stamp would go on sale in mid-January.

This headline appeared on the front page of the Ames Daily Tribune, Monday January 4, 1943:

**RUSSIAN OIL FIELD SAVED  
Nazis Suffering Severe Losses  
As Powerful Red Offensive  
Pushes Ahead**



That issue also featured this front-page article:

### **3 Teachers Join WAACs**

*The Ames public school system is about to lose three more instructors to the armed forces.*

*Three high school teachers have been inducted into the Women's Army Auxiliary corps and will be ordered to report sometime this month.*

*The teachers are Alvira Lunsford, girls physical education director; Helen Hadish, Spanish and English instructor, and Lelah Spatz, social studies and first aid teacher.*

Lela Spatz, a good friend of my Uncle Roy and Aunt Grace of Des Moines, taught my bookkeeping class. I failed the course.

This story also appeared on that front-page:

### **STORY TO GET 20 BIKES IN JANUARY**

*Des Moines (UP) Iowans will have 920 new bicycles to ride in January, according to the Office of Price Administration. The new quota for the sale of the bicycles shows an increase of 17 bicycles over the December allotment.*

*Quotas for several of the counties are: Boone, 10; Marshall, 50; Polk, 30; Story, 20; Webster, 15.*

My name was included in the list set out in a Tribune front-page article Thursday, January 7, 1943, under this headline:

### **"C" CARDS ARE ISSUED TO 528 BY AMES PRICE RATION BOARD**

There it was, "Robert J. Clark, war worker," listed with 527 others who had obtained rationing cards granting permission to purchase in excess of the normal gasoline ration.

The Saturday, January 9<sup>th</sup> Tribune carried this headline:

### **OVERWHELMING VICTORY FOR ALLIES AT NEW GUINEA**

#### **Sink Jap Flotilla in Three Day Battle**

I arrived home after work one evening and Mom handed me a penny postcard that had arrived in the mail. It was from the local draft board ordering me to report at the Ames City Hall on Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943.

The next morning Beverly clocked in and waited for me. I got in the time clock line. After clocking in she and I made our way through the crowd and north down the hallway.

"I got my draft notice," I said calmly.

"You did?"

We continued walking.

"Hafta report the 22<sup>nd</sup>."

"Oh, that's not much time!"

"Boy, I know it!"

I stopped again, turned to her and clasped her hands.

"Excuse me. Hafta notify the office."



"I know. I'll tell the others."

Beverly walked into the work area and spread the word of my leaving. I walked down the hallway to "Papa Burns" office. He finished giving instructions to three workers who turned after talking to Mr. Burns and walked out of the office. As I stood waiting at his desk, Jessie walked into the room carrying a clipboard. She flipped the pages over and laid it on the desk.

Mr. Burns walked toward me. Jessie moved in to listen.

"You wanted to see me, Clark?"

"Yes. I got my notice. I report on the 22<sup>nd</sup>."

"Oh, that's not long," Jessie said with alarm.

"You don't know how we'll hate to see you go, Mr. Clark," said Mr. Burns.

"That's the truth, R. J.," Jessie added.

"Thanks for everything." I said, turning to walk out.

A quarter century earlier, Dad had been in training at Camp Dodge before leaving for France. I would be among Story County's largest contingent of draftees reporting to Camp Dodge on Friday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

A picture appeared in the paper showing Bruce slogging through the mud in Marine dungarees, helmet, cigarette at the left edge of his mouth, carrying a rifle in his hands and a bicycle on his shoulder. The caption read: *A BIRTHDAY GIFT FROM TOJO - - - Marine Private First Class Warren B. Clark, 22, son of Mr. and Mrs. George A. Clark, Route 3, Ames, Iowa, slogs through the mud on Cape Gloucester, New Britain, with the Jap bicycle he obtained for his birthday, January 8. A member of the combat engineers, he used a flame thrower, and was with a demolitions squad in blowing up caves in which Japs were hidden.*



Although the combat photographer's caption was in error concerning Bruce's age, my parents, brothers and sisters and I were overjoyed to see his picture and learn exactly what he was doing. He reached the age of 21, not 22, on January 8<sup>th</sup>. Bruce had never gone by his first name, Warren.



Edythe had moved to an apartment on the second floor of an older home in east Ames. Her roommate was engaged to John Roche, my former Ames High classmate Paul Young had been dating Clara. They were close to becoming engaged.

Beverly had spent a night at Edythe's. The next afternoon, one of my last days at the plant, I picked up the two young ladies at Edythe's in the '31 Chevy. Before heading to Ankeny for work I drove around Ames. Schools were closed. I drove over a snow packed sidewalk and onto a schoolyard pond covered with ice. I raced the car's motor, spinning the wheels, got up speed, slammed on the brakes to spin the car and slide on the ice. The girls laughed and enjoyed the thrill of swinging around on the ice but warned me I may be arrested. After a few more spins I drove back into the street before attracting attention.

We returned to Edythe's apartment. She went inside and came out with a small camera.



**Bob took a picture of Beverly and Edythe as they stood on the snow-covered sidewalk in front of Adam's Funeral Home.**





**Edythe took a picture of Beverly and Bob.**

Sally had received a letter from Coastguardsman Dick Fargo who was stationed in the eastern part of the country. We each added a personal comment to a letter she was sending back to him. Paul continued his derogatory jokes about old Jessie.

"Russ has the old crate hitched to a St. Bernard with a cask on its neck." Russ drove her to work and back in bitter cold weather, certain he would be called into the army at any time. I thought it ironic Russ sold his car because he had expected to be called to active duty months earlier. I bought the car and was leaving ahead of him.

My last day at the plant had arrived. Paul Young had received his draft notice. On my very first day at DMOP, six months earlier, I had met Beverly Ann Barringer at the water fountain. Badge number 137 and badge 181 got together there many times afterward. It was all ending.

I learned early she didn't appreciate being addressed as "Bev" but didn't mind "Bebe" as her college friends had written in her yearbook, or "BB," her first and last initials. The little lady with the sparkling blue eyes, contagious smile and bouncing honey colored hair had taken me to her world of smiles and beauty, and had given me a glimpse of heaven.

After card number 137 clocked out I clocked out card number 181 for the last time. Available Jones, Clara, Sally, Edythe, Paul, Russ, and even Herb, promised to write me once I sent a service address.

I left the gang at the time clock area and walked down the hallway, stopping at Mr. Burns' office to turn in badge number 181. He shook my hand.



"Bob, it's been a real pleasure having you here. I wish you all the best."

"Thank you, Mr. Burns."

I turned and walked out into the hallway, turned right, and went out the door, thinking back to that hot day in July when I first arrived and the fond memories I was taking away.



**Color post card of the Sheldon Munn Hotel, Main Street at Kellogg, downtown Ames, Iowa. Busses parked on Kellogg (right end of hotel). Before dawn, January 29, 1943, Jeep Wierson, Kenny Craig, Eddie Gibb, Jim Warren and Bob boarded busses in Story County's largest WWII contingent to leave for Camp Dodge.**

Early the next morning, I drove my 1931 Chevy to Ames and parked on 5<sup>th</sup> Street near the city hall. I boarded a bus. At Camp Dodge we remained in civilian clothes as we took mental and physical tests. The Friday mess hall chow consisted of a fish dinner. Those of us who passed the exams were furloughed for seven days. We rode the busses back to Ames.

This article commenced on the front page of the January 22<sup>nd</sup> Ames Daily Tribune and continued on page two:

**114 STORY COUNTY MEN DRAFTED  
Largest Contingent Left Ames  
For Camp Dodge this A. M.**



*One hundred fourteen Story county army selectees, the largest contingent ever to be called up by the local board, were ordered to report for induction Friday at Camp Dodge army reception center, Des Moines. The group left at 6:00 a.m.. Friday on three special busses.*

I had one week to do all the things I may never get the opportunity to do again. On Saturday night, Beverly and I went to the movie, "White Cargo." In it screen sex goddess, Hedy Lamarr, played "Tondelayo," a seductive native girl who wore only a tiny cloth. To amuse me Beverly later performed her version of a sensuous "Tondelayo."

I drove to Chariton for a hurried visit with my Uncle Earl and Aunt Bess. Earl was my dad's youngest brother. He operated a shoe repair shop on the south side of the square there. He was about my Dad's height, near six feet, with black hair and brown eyes, weighing a good 200 pounds with a slight beer belly. After a good visit with Earl, I drove to his house and paid my Aunt Bess a call. She was a short stocky full-faced lady with green eyes and red hair. She greeted me at the front door with her customary winning smile.

"Well, this is a surprise," she said, opening the door for me to enter.

I stepped inside.

"I'm in the middle of doing dishes. Come on back."

I followed Aunt Bess, in her navy blue print dress and white apron, back to the kitchen at the northwest corner of the small home. She continued washing dishes at the sink.

"I stopped by the shop and had a good visit with Uncle Earl."

"Oh, I'm glad you did," said Aunt Bess. "I'm sure he appreciated that."

"I wanted to see you both before I left for the service. I'm now on a seven-day furlough. We report back to Camp Dodge Friday."

"You don't have much time! First Bruce . . . now you."

"Bruce's picture was in the paper."

"Yes . . . your mom wrote about that," said Aunt Bess. "We're in a terrible time. Did you know your Uncle Carl enlisted?"

"Really?"

"In the Marines."

"I thought he'd be too old."

"I guess not. He passed the physical. It's nice of you to make the trip down, Bob."

The front door opened. My cousin Harry Keith, 14, Earl and Bess's oldest, burst into the living room and on to the kitchen, talking a mile a minute. Harry had sandy colored hair with blue eyes and was nearly my height.

"I saw the eighty-five on the license plate out there! Story County car. I knew one of George's gang was here."

Harry Keith grabbed my hand and gave it a hearty shake.

"Bob, old boy, glad to see ya!"

"Harry Keith . . . you're as tall as your mother!" I said enthusiastically. Helen Marie, his sister a couple years younger, followed him into the house. She had brown eyes, dark hair and had reached all of four feet, six inches.



Why my uncle and aunt called their children by their first and middle names when they were young was a mystery to me. They did, so we did. Later, the middle names were dropped in referring to them.

"Hi, Bob," said Helen Marie. "What are you doing in Chariton?"

"Just came down to say goodbye."

"He's already in the service," Aunt Bess explained. "He reports to Camp Dodge Friday."

"We'll sure miss you. Bob," said Helen Marie politely.

"Can't wait 'til I'm old enough to go," said Harry.

"You two get out of those school clothes and get started on your work," Aunt Bess said to the kids.

They rushed upstairs.

"I didn't want to leave without telling you something," I said.

Aunt Bess, at the sink drying dishes, turned around to face me, a plate in one hand and a towel in the other.

"What's that?"

"You've always been my favorite aunt," I managed through tightened vocal cords.

"Well, that's nice to hear," she said. "Thanks, Bob."

I had finally expressed what I had wanted Aunt Bess to know for a long time and had managed to blurt it out before heading into that great unknown.

I said "Goodbye" to Aunt Bess, got into the '31 Chevy, waved one last time, tooted the horn and drove away, realizing I may never see any of them again. I was always glad I had made that special trip to visit the Chariton branch of the family.

The week since being inducted at Camp Dodge passed rapidly. Late on Thursday, January 28, 1943, I was in the northwest upstairs bedroom at "Route 3," as we referred to our farm, dressing for the evening and packing the brown leather shaving kit Beverly had given me at Christmas. I wouldn't be coming home. I was about to drive to Ames and meet Beverly at Edythe's. Beverly and I planned on dancing to the Gene Krupa orchestra at the Tromar Ballroom in Des Moines that night and stay up until time to meet the bus at the Sheldon Munn Hotel in Ames early the next morning.

Wearing brown pants, white shirt, brown tie and tan sport coat I carried the shaving kit downstairs.

"Mom," I shouted from the dining room toward the kitchen. "I'll mail these clothes back from Camp Dodge."

I took my new gray overcoat from the rack.

"All right," she said. "George and I'll meet you at the Sheldon-Munn."

With my overcoat draped over my arm, I sat the shaving kit on the dining room table. Mom, followed by several of the kids, came into the dining room.

"You'll finally get to meet Beverly."

"Yes . . . finally. I'll have to set the alarm for three or three-thirty."

"Do you mind takin' Beverly over to Edythe's after our busses leave?"



"Oh, that's no trouble at all. We'll be glad to."

"Did I give ya the address?" I asked.

"Yes," Mom replied, "I have it."

"I hope you find a way to get the pick-up home."

"Dad'll ride back to town with Harold when he goes to work."

"Oh, that'll work out . . . yeah."

Harold Lee, our neighbor to the west, worked with heavy construction equipment and drove his dump truck to Ames early each morning.

"See ya at the hotel," I said.

"You two will be dead tired tomorrow, staying up all night," said Mom with a chuckle. "Have a good time! We'll see you early in the morning."

"Okay, I'm off! Bye, kids, I won't be back for a while."

As I pulled my overcoat on, five-year old Kay grabbed my left leg. Gary, three, grabbed the right one. Mom automatically reached their arms, pulling them away. I picked up my shaving kit from the table, turned and walked through the vestibule with kids pressing against me and Mom behind them, opened the front door and turned back.

"Bye, guys," I said. "Now you write me."

I raked a pointed right index finger across in front of them.

"We will," came the chorus of replies.

"You write us first," said Marj.

"Sure will. Bye."

"Bye, Bob," the varied voices echoed against one another.

Conscious that heat was escaping with the door open I slowly pulled it closed and hurried in the frigid air across the crunching snow to my car.

Beverly had ridden with Edythe from the plant after getting off work at 4:00 p.m., to Edythe's apartment. I pulled the '31 Chevy up in front of the two-story older home. I left the motor running to keep the inside of the car warm on that bitterly cold night, got out and walked up the snow-packed sidewalk to the front steps, across the wood porch and knocked on the door. I heard Beverly's footsteps coming down the stairs. The door opened and there she stood, carrying her new dark colored fur coat. She was dressed in brown slacks, white blouse and tan sport coat. It was the last time we dressed alike. I took the fur coat from her and helped her into it.

"Have a good time, you guys!" called Edythe from the top of the stairs.

"Thanks," I called back. "We will."

"You write to us, R. J."

"I will."

"See you in the morning, Beverly."

"Yes, it'll be early," Beverly called back to Edythe. Good night, Edythe."

"Bye, guys," Edythe called back.

On our way to the Tromar, Beverly snuggled close to me. We cruised along listening to big band music from the car radio. I drove as usual with my left hand on the steering wheel and my right arm around her. Once on Fifth Avenue just north of the bus station I drove around searching for a



parking place. There were lots of cars parked on the streets near the Tromar, indicating the ballroom would be crowded

Once parked, we traipsed through the bitterly cold night air to the dance hall. Our calculations were accurate. The ballroom was very crowded. Beverly and I located a booth and ordered cokes. We danced, talked of our good times over the past half year, joked and laughed. It was another beautiful evening. We didn't dwell on the fact it was our last night together for many moons.

During intermission Beverly joined the other ladies in the ladies room. I took that opportunity to cross the dance floor to the stage. A middle aged man, a member of the orchestra, sat looking through sheets of music. I asked him if the orchestra would play, "White Christmas." He made a note of my request.

Along about midnight Gene Krupa, the bandleader and former drummer for the famous Benny Goodman orchestra, announced the upcoming song, "Drum Boogie." The dancers swarmed in front of the stage. The band played most of the way through the song, then stopped. Gene took over on the drums. He was in the spotlight performing a magnificent drum solo that thrilled the huge crowd for several minutes. Orchestra music swept up at the end of Gene's solo to finish the song. We in the crowd cheered wildly, whistled and applauded, thrilled at having been entertained by the world's greatest big band drummer presenting the highlight of the night.

Upon hearing the familiar strains of "White Christmas", Beverly and I hurried out onto the dance floor, now suddenly very crowded. The song had become such a favorite. I held her close as we danced slowly, attempting to avoid bumping into the other couples.

"I requested this one at intermission."

"Leave it to you," said Beverly softly with a smile. "Oh, I'm going to miss you."

We pulled each other closer, barely moving on the crowded floor but swaying to the music. When it came to the right place in the song, I sang softly, "To hear sleigh bells in the snow . . ."

"Whenever I think of you," Beverly said, "I'll hear sleigh bells in the snow."

It had reached 2:00 a.m. The band was still playing and many dancers were on the floor. Finally, the familiar strains of, "Good Night Ladies," swept through the ballroom telling everyone the dance was ending.

Again Beverly and I braved the frigid weather and walked quickly to the car. We sat inside waiting for the heater to warm us, listening to big band music on the radio, all the time cuddling and kissing, knowing there was no tomorrow. When the car was fairly warm inside I drove to the Hi Ho Restaurant on Euclid Avenue. We ate, sipped cokes and played the jukebox. In almost no time it was after three in the morning, January 29<sup>th</sup>. I was scheduled to be at the Sheldon-Munn Hotel in Ames by 5:00 a.m.



I drove to Ames on Highway 69, stopping at the Lincoln Way stop sign, then proceeded north across the Chicago-Northwestern railroad tracks and turned left onto Main Street, drove nearly two blocks west and parked on the north side of the street in front the American Legion building. It was almost 5:00 a.m.

We hurried along the snow-packed sidewalk on the north side of Main Street, west past closed businesses, the cigar store and Rainbow Café on the corner. Three busses headed south were parked along the west side of Kellogg Avenue, their motors running. We crossed Kellogg and arrived at the right side of the first bus. The dim bluish hues from streetlights provided illumination for making out people's faces. A bus driver stood beside each opened bus door. As we moved into the gathering crowd the clanking of the bus motors was nearly drowned out by constant chattering. People's breath was visible in the frigid night air.

In the dim light I spied my parents standing near the brick wall of the hotel. They had met old friends, parents of draftees, they had known from the time we lived in town during the 1920s and early '30s.

Dad and Mom had just finished talking to Mrs. Gibbs, the Scottish mother of Eddie, a fellow draftee and former school friend. They turned to see Beverly and me walking toward them.

"This is Beverly," I announced as we reached my parents, my breath steaming out ahead of me in the crisp cold darkness.

Beverly removed her right glove and shook hands with my mother, then with my Dad.

"Hello," said Beverly beaming her customary warm smile. "So good to meet you both."

"Well," said Mom. "We've heard so much about *Beverly*."

"Good to meet you, young lady," said Dad, patting her on the shoulder with his left hand as he shook her hand with his right.

I handed Dad the car keys.

"What's this?" asked Dad. "Oh, the keys."

"It's parked in front of the Legion."

"Oh, all right," Dad said. "Thanks."

"We were just talking to Mrs. Gibb," said Mom. "I hadn't seen her in years. She still has that thick Scottish accent."

"Oh, Eddie's Mom," I said, then spying a friend, "there's Jeep."

I reached for Eugene Wierson's arm. He had been nicknamed, "Jeep," a comic strip character, at school.

"Jeep, this is Beverly. You know my folks."

"Good morning, every body," Jeep said. "Glad to meet you, Beverly."

"We sure wish you boys all the luck in the world!" said Mom.

"Thanks," said Jeep. "We'll sure need it. I know Mr. Clark has been all through this. Any advice for us, George?"

"My advice is . . . never volunteer for a damned thing," Dad replied.

"We'll remember that," said Jeep, "won't we, Bob?"



"You bet."

Jeep was from a family the size of ours. An older sister, Edith, my age, had endured the same special summer school course I did a couple years before. Jeep and I had become good friends in high school. He had black hair, blue-green eyes, stood about 5' 9" with square shoulders and weighed around 160 pounds.

"Gotta get back to my folks," said Jeep. "Glad to have met you, Beverly."

"You, too," Beverly said, "Jeep, is it?"

"Yeah, that'll do. Bye folks."

"Goodbye," Mom said.

"Good luck, fella!" called Dad.

Jeep walked away. I turned to Beverly for a final word.

"My folks'll drive you to over to Edythe's."

"That'll sure be appreciated," Beverly said. "R. J., if you're still at Camp Dodge Sunday, maybe Grinny and I can come visit."

"Okay."

"I'll see if I can reach you by phone first."

Our conversation was suddenly terminated by a man's loud voice, "Let me have your attention here!" he yelled. "Quiet! Quiet down!"

We all turned to hear his instructions. The crowd became silent. Attorney Mauer, draft director, a short middle-aged black haired man wearing horn-rimmed glasses, carried a clipboard and flashlight. He made his way through the crowd and stopped to stand next to the driver at the door of the first bus.

Maurer proceeded calling out names of draftees assigned the first bus then moved to the door of the second bus. Draftees whose names had been called hurried to board the first bus.

"The following men will board bus number two immediately."

The second bus roster included "Kenneth M. Craig," "Victor Eugene Wierson," "Edward T. Gibb" and "Robert J. Clark."

Eddie Gibb said goodbye to his mother at the bus door and climbed aboard. I turned back, shook hands with each of my parents then pulled Beverly close and kissed her warmly. I turned and joined Jeep moving toward the door of bus number two. Maurer completed the roll call for the second bus and moved on north to the door of the last bus.

When Jeep and I reached the door of the bus Mrs. Gibb grasped each of us by an arm.

"You boys promise to take good care of wee Eddie," she pleaded. "Now you promise me!!"

"We promise," said Jeep.

"We will, Mrs. Gibb." I echoed.

"You promise . . ."

I climbed aboard. Jeep followed, stepping up onto the bus. We turned to give Mrs. Gibb last-minute assurance as the guys pushed past to board.

"We'll look after wee Eddie, Mrs. Gibb," Jeep promised. "Don't worry!"



The bus driver waited for the last man to board then took his seat behind the large steering wheel and pulled the lever closing the door.

The right side of the bus, the window side next to the crowd along the sidewalk, had filled rapidly. Jeep and I located an empty seat on the left side. We tried to get a final glimpse out the right side windows. Those occupying the right side seats blocked our view. I managed to glimpse through a tiny space between them, but it was nearly impossible to distinguish anyone on the sidewalk in the early morning darkness. The third bus filled rapidly. In a short time the bus ahead of us pulled out.

Our bus moved. As we rode down Highway 69 out of town just south of Ames someone started to sing loudly, "The bells are ringin'. . ."

Several additional voices chimed in.

"for me and my gal."

Then, as if rehearsed the rest of us joined in, becoming a loud disjointed chorus.

"The birds are singin'  
For me and my gal.  
Everybody's been knowin'  
To a wedding they're goin'.  
And for weeks they've been sewin'  
Every Susie and Sal.  
They're congregatin'  
For me and my gal.  
The parson's waitin'  
For me and my gal.  
And someday soon  
We'll build a home for two,  
Or three or four or more  
In Loveland  
For me and my gal."

As that song concluded, someone led off, "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy..." We all chimed in.

"Yankee Doodle Do or Die."

That song was no more than finished when someone sounded off with,

"You're a grand ole flag.  
You're a high flyin' flag!"

Every one on the bus must have seen the currently popular movies, "For Me and My Gal" and "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Before reaching Des Moines, we had sung the lyrics as best we could to every song from those films. By the time our busses arrived at Camp Dodge we had sung many several times. We even sang songs of World War I, "Give My Regards to Broadway," "Over There," and "Oh, How I hate to Get Up In The Morning."

The three busses stopped on a narrow paved road on the west slope of a snow-covered hill. We hurried to get off the busses and were met by soldiers who informed us they were sergeants. We answered roll call, then were



assigned temporary barracks. Each GI was assigned a cot covered with olive drab colored blankets.

We were then rushed to the supply building where we stood in line for GI clothing. It was my first "hurry up and wait" military experience. At "Supply" we were issued two dark green (olive drab) bags, called barracks bags. We were to stuff all other olive drab (OD) items being issued into the bags. We were issued OD colored socks, under shirts, boxer shorts, long sleeved undershirts, long johns, wool olive drab and khaki shirts and pants. There were big brown shoes of the type we had always called "work shoes." We came away with OD colored towels and washcloths and khaki colored neckties.

It was Friday and again the noon mess hall meal consisted of fish. We stood in line for chow and for the infirmary, receiving seven shots. We each packed our "civvies" and trusted Supply to mail the clothes home.

Late that afternoon I was anxious to drop onto the cot I had already found easy to call "the sack." The shots had left me very sick. I felt as if I had the flu. I couldn't get up for evening chow, but slept through until morning.

The next day, Saturday, I was still recovering from the shots. I joined Jeep at early chow, but ate very little. I slept, but kept waking up; afraid a phone call from Beverly would be missed. None of us were given any schedule of events so we thought we may be shipped out at any time.

Saturday afternoon a military messenger delivered a small piece of paper to me, a telephone message. It read, "Beverly will come to the day room at 2:00 p.m., Sunday."

I joined the others in the mess hall for Sunday breakfast, then commenced feeling better. Jeep and Eddie had also felt the results of the shots, but not as severely. Rumors of where we were going circulated wildly. Of course, Missouri was nearby so that was always a popularly rumored destination. But, the Florida rumor persisted.

I was concerned we would be ordered to move out before I could get to see Beverly once more.

I located what was called a "Day Room." I figured Ginny must have told Beverly that would be the logical place to meet on a military base. Ginny's boy friend had been in the Army for some time.

At two o'clock, I went to the day room. In no time, I walked two pretty young ladies in light tan coats. Both had long honey-colored hair bouncing on their shoulders. Both were in heels and sported silk stockings. When the coats came off both wore white sweaters bearing their tri-delt pins. I was in love with the shorter lady immediately. Beverly introduced me to her sorority sister, Ginny. I helped Beverly off with her coat, draped it over my arm and took Ginny's coat as she removed it. I hung the coats on a nearly filled coat rack near the door the girls had entered.

"You look real spiffy in those army clothes," Beverly said, throwing an arm around my waist.



"I sure don't have any choice," I said with a chuckle.

"Grinny, this is Bob."

"Hi, Grinny," I said, shaking her hand. "I've heard a lot about you."

"I've heard a lot about you, too, Bob," said Grinny. "Nice meeting you."

The three of us moved among the GIs and civilians scattered throughout the day room. We located three empty seats in the southeast corner and sat down. Grinny commenced talking about her boyfriend, Gene Badgely, also from Pleasantville. Gene, an army officer, was stationed in Oregon. Grinny worked for a Des Moines insurance company.

The girls discussed humorous episodes from their sorority days at Simpson and brought each other up to date on events since their last meeting. I enjoyed listening to their lilting conversation without much to contribute except that I had feared I would be gone before they arrived. Our time together passed swiftly. Grinny had to meet someone at four o'clock.

"Where will you go, Bob?" asked Grinny.

"Remember," Beverly quipped, "loose lips sink ships!"

The three of us chuckled.

"Well," I said, "there are lotsa rumors."

"Gene says the army thrives on rumors," Grinny added.

"I've heard Missouri and . . ."

"Oh," Beverly interrupted, "that wouldn't be far. I could come visit."

"But, the rumor heard most is that we'll go to Florida."

"I know you two want to be alone," said Grinny. "I'll get my coat."

Grinny walked across the room to the coat rack. Ignoring those around us, Beverly and I embraced and kissed, holding it a long time.

"One thirty-seven," I said quietly, "I'll sure miss you!"

"I'll always hear sleigh bells in the snow," Beverly said softly. "It's so hard realizing you're no longer one eighty-one. Now you write as soon as you can. I love you, R. J."

"Oh, I love you, B. B."

I pulled her close. She held me tightly. We kissed. Grinny, wearing her own coat, delivered Beverly's. I released Beverly, turned, lifted the coat from Grinny's arm and helped Beverly on with it.

"So good meeting you, Bob," said Grinny, "even under these circumstances."

"You, too, Grinny."

She led the way to the door. Beverly followed. Almost through the door Beverly turned and blew me a kiss. With a quick wave they were gone.

Back in the barracks Jeep and Eddie appeared anxious to see me.

"Did you get to see your girl?" asked Jeep.

"Oh, yeah!" I said. "Her sorority sister drove her over here."

"Good thing," said Eddie. "We're about to ship out."

"We have to be ready at six," said Jeep. "Eighteen hundred hours."

"Too bad Bettylou and Carlene couldn't be here," I said.



Both Jeep and Eddie were engaged. Jeep had dated Bettylou Comstock, who graduated in my Ames High class, for a couple years. I had met Carlene Sharp, a Nevada resident, at the Sport Club dances in Nevada. She and Eddie were outstanding jitterbug dancers.

A sergeant burst into the barracks, ordering us to toss our belongings into the two barracks bags we had been issued and carry the bags to a waiting truck. Jeep, Eddie and I followed orders, putting everything except our shaving kits into the bags. I proudly showed the guys the brown leather shaving kit that Beverly had given me as a Christmas present.

We struggled to get the heavy bags out through the barracks door into the deep snow. There we did as we noticed others were doing, slung one bag over a shoulder and drug the second one through the snow to trucks parked on a narrow paved roadway. Canvas canopies covered the beds of the olive drab colored trucks. We tossed the bags up onto the back of a truck. Two GIs wearing fatigues worked away on the back of the truck stacking the bags and making room for others being tossed aboard. We were then directed to another line of trucks parked ahead of those carrying our bags. I followed Jeep, climbing up into the back of a truck. Eddie followed me.

We three sat together on one of the long wooden benches attached to the sides of the truck bed and rode beneath its canopy in the frigid evening air. It was dark when we arrived at the railroad station in downtown Des Moines. We alighted from the back of the truck and boarded a waiting troop train. Eddie linked up with one of the other guys from home. Jeep and I shared a seat on the left side of the rail car.

I told him I was going to try phoning my parents. Jeep held my seat. I got off the rail car and searched for a pay telephone, finally locating one against the dark red brick depot wall. I dug into my woolen olive drab GI pants pockets for coins. An operator came on the line and I placed a call to 22F14, rural Ames. The country telephone line was filled with static. I finally made out my dad's voice.

"Hello, Dad?"

"Is that you, Bob?"

"Yes, I'm at the railroad station in Des Moines. We're about to leave."

"Do you know where you're going?"

"Most of the guys think we're going to Florida. I'll write when I get there, wherever it is."

"I wish you the best of luck, Bob. We'll wait til we hear from you."

"I've gotta go. I'll write ya. Bye."

I hung up and ran back to the rail car, boarded and took my seat next to Jeep, near the center of the car. He had removed his heavy OD overcoat.

"Did ya get through?" asked Jeep.

"Yeah . . . talked to Dad a minute. Told him I thought we were headed for Florida."

"Oh, there are new rumors now"



I pulled the heavy coat off, folded it and placed it, along with my shaving kit, beside Jeep's overcoat and small bag in the overhead rack. The train lurched forward, rocking me to drop into the seat. Our train was moving.

"Boy!" exclaimed Jeep, "you didn't make it back any too soon!"

"Oh, did you wanna sit by the window?" I asked.

"Naw . . . I can see all I want from here. Nothin' but night out there anyway. Ah . . . rumor has it we're goin' to California, Texas, Missouri, and of course . . . Florida."

The train moved ahead, slowly picking up speed.

"I guess we sleep sittin' up, huh?" I asked.

"This is the army, Mr. Jones . . ." Jeep answered singing.

"No private rooms or telephones," I belted out in song.

"You had your breakfast in bed before," Jeep and I roared simultaneously.

We were immediately joined by a chorus of GIs in seats around us.

"But you won't have it there anymore.

The song spread rapidly throughout the rail car as the steel wheels clanked rhythmically beneath us.

This is the army, Mr. Brown.

You and your baby went to town.

She had you worried but this is war.

And she won't worry you anymore.

Do what the bugler commands.

He's in the army and not in a band.

This is the army, Mister Green.

You'll keep the barracks nice and clean.

You had a housemaid to clean your floor.

But she won't help you out anymore.

As the song was ending Jeep stood up, stepped into the aisle, raised his arms and led us into the next tune.

"Hey, 'you're a . . . grand . . . old . . . flag . . .'

Everyone joined in with, "You're a high flying flag . . . and forever in peace may you wave . . ." We sang until late in the night, ending with "White Christmas."

"I'm dreaming of a White Christmas

Just like the ones we used to know.

Where the treetops glisten

And children listen

To hear sleigh bells in the snow."

"Whenever I think of you," echoed Beverly's whisper, "I'll hear sleigh bells in the snow."



The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that the study of the history of the United States is essential for a full understanding of the country and its people. The second part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the world. It is argued that the study of the history of the world is essential for a full understanding of the world and its people. The third part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States and the world. It is argued that the study of the history of the United States and the world is essential for a full understanding of the United States and the world.



## CHAPTER 5

Early the following morning, Monday, March 1, 1943, I awoke to the clickety-clack of train wheels rolling rapidly over the tracks. We had traveled many miles south of the frigid Iowa winter. Jeep and I removed our olive drab (OD) jackets, folded them neatly and pressed them into the tiny spaces above our heavy GI coats on the overhead rack. Soon Jeep, Eddie and I, shaving kits in hand, stood in the long line backed up from the car's rest room. The heat and humidity reminded us we wore wool long underwear, shirts, pants and khaki neckties. Barracks bags containing cooler clothing were in a baggage car somewhere on the train.

Jeep returned from the rest room ahead of me and occupied the seat next the window. We noticed others, seeking cool air, had opened the rail car windows. Jeep found a way to open our window. Soot from the engine's coal smoke drifted in through the open windows. I felt the grime in the heat of the day and saw black soot smudges on the sweaty faces of the other GIs. As we traveled, still not sure of our destination, the heat brought on drowsiness. I dropped off to sleep.

Late that morning, our train ground to a halt in what appeared to be the middle of nowhere. After a few minutes our rail car lurched to a start. We were on our way again.

Later in the day, word circulated that someone had pulled the cord that stretched lengthwise along the ceiling of the cars, automatically bringing the entire train to a stop. Later we were informed one of our Ames friends, Kenny Barnhouse, had become ill and pulled the cord, stopping the troop train. He was removed from the train. Much later we learned he had been discharged from the service.

The southern humidity increased as we traveled, adding to the discomfort of the heat and sooty grime. One-by-one the windows were closed. Rumors increased that we were heading for Florida and would arrive there the next day.

Between periods of drifting off to sleep, Jeep and I brought each other up to date on our love lives. He was engaged to Bettylou Comstock, cousin of Arlene Passmore, who had been in Chicago when I was, the summer of '41. Bettylou had graduated in the class of '41 as I had. She was a few months older than "Victor Eugene Wierson," as the GI noncoms clearly enunciated when calling roll from their rosters. Bettylou was an inch or so shorter than Jeep. She had a trim figure, brown hair and eyes.



Jeep had seen Beverly only once and then just briefly Friday in the early morning darkness as we prepared to board the bus for Camp Dodge, at Ames. I told him of the good times she and I had enjoyed after meeting at the ordnance plant. Although Beverly and Bettylou had never met, they had each promised to visit us when they could.

Late the following morning, word circulated that we would arrive at our destination, St. Petersburg, in a couple hours. Neither Jeep nor I knew where in Florida, St. Petersburg was located. We dropped off to sleep.

Eventually, the train slowed. We awoke to bright sunshine outside. Our train was moving slowly parallel to a palm tree-laden city street. The train lurched. Clanking of the steel couplings between the rail cars notified us our train was about to stop.

A sergeant appeared in the aisle ahead of us shouting, "Prepare to disembark!" He continued down the aisle to the car behind us where he repeated the order, "Prepare to disembark!"

As the train moved slowly, Jeep arose and reached his dress coat from the overhead rack. I grabbed mine before it dropped, quickly pulling it on and buttoning it. We reached our heavy olive drab overcoats, unfolded them and pulled them on just as the train came to a stop. We rolled with the sudden halt of the train and reached up on the rack for our musette bags, slinging them over our shoulders to hang by the straps. Greatly relieved to be exiting the grimy rail car Jeep and I joined a line of GIs moving slowly toward the steps.

The St. Petersburg weather was so balmy I felt as if I was walking into a bowl of hot soup as I stepped down from the rail car. A sergeant ordered us to listen for our names as the barracks bags were tossed from the baggage car into piles between the streetcar rails running along the center of the red brick street. I heard my name called, dragged my two barracks bags from the pile and hoisted them up onto my shoulders.

We were ordered to get into a formation and carry our bags north. We trudged in four columns between the streetcar tracks several blocks in the stifling wool clothing to the Hotel Pennsylvania. There we were informed the hotel would be our temporary home. We waited for room assignments and were ordered to change into summer underwear and khaki uniforms. The U. S. military had taken over this and other resort areas. We were informed a nearby cafeteria would be our mess hall.

We were instructed to read a small booklet we had been issued at Camp Dodge titled, "Articles of War" and when to "fall out" for calisthenics conducted by one of the noncoms outside the hotel in the hot sand.

We learned "The St. Petersburg Times" advertised that its newspapers were free any day the sun did not shine on the gulf beach city.

We were given a return address so scurried to buy picture postcards. Jeep, Eddie and I ended up in room 412. On our bunks we quickly wrote cards to Bettylou, Carlene, Beverly and our parents. We didn't need stamps,



but wrote "Free" in the upper right corner on the address side of cards and envelopes.

After three days at the Pennsylvania Hotel, we were ordered to get our belongings into barracks bags and load the bags onto GI trucks. We climbed onto the back of a truck, sitting on wood plank-type seats along the sides, carrying our gas masks and musette bags by the shoulder straps. About two dozen of us GIs sat, jammed side-by-side, for the twenty-mile ride north to Clearwater. The trucks came to a halt in front of the Gray Moss Inn. We jumped off the back of the truck and waited for the trucks carrying our bags. We were assigned to the Harrison Hotel on the west side of the street opposite the Gray Moss Inn.

A chunky, black, curly haired, dark eyed middle-aged man sporting three chevrons with three arcs beneath on the upper sleeves of his khaki shirt greeted us in the lobby of the Harrison.

"I'm Master Sergeant Pursuiti," he grumbled in a distinct Brooklyn accent. "Youze guys ain't gonna forget me!"

No one laughed.

"Listen for your name," the sergeant continued. "When da corporal here calls roll, he'll give ya room numbas. Climb doze stairs to your assigned rooms and leave your bags. Change into shorts. Den come back down and get in formation on da north side of dis building. We'll get in some calisthenics before goin' to chow! Go ahead, corporal."

The corporal commenced roll call, assigning each of us to a room as we answered. My name, starting with the letter "C," was called early. "Clark, room 312," the corporal shouted. I grabbed my barracks bags and commenced climbing the stairs. On the third floor I located room 312 just to the west of the stairwell on the north side of the building. The doors had been removed from the rooms. I walked in and slammed my barracks bag down onto a lower bunk on the north side near a window.

"Hey, Bob, what room is this?" asked Eddie Gibb, standing outside the doorway with his musette bag and gas mask dangling from the shoulder strap and his barracks bag on his arched back.

"312. See the small numbers . . . right side of the doorway there."

Eddie entered the room and walked past me, dropping his bags by the west wall double-decker bunk.

"I'm grabbin' this lower bunk here," he said. "Did they give us an address yet? I wanna write Carlene."

"Not yet."

Standing beside my lower bunk I commenced changing into fatigues.

George Whitfield, another former classmate, hesitated outside the doorway, peering through his glasses at the room number. George was a blond, blue eyed studious appearing guy about my height and weight. He entered, dragging his bags, quickly removing his musette bag to drop on the lower bunk along the south wall. He dragged his barracks bags to the west end of the bunk and sat down on the bunk as if guarding it.



"Old home week, huh?" George asked.

"Hey, George, do you know what address we use here?" Eddie asked. "I wanna let Carlene know we moved."

"I haven't heard," George replied on the way to the bathroom carrying the GI shorts he had removed from a barracks bag.

Jeep approached talking with Jim Warren. They hesitated at the doorway, checked the room number and entered, dragging their bags.

"Any bunks left in here?" asked Jeep.

"George . . . Bob . . . Eddie!" Jim exclaimed with a smile. "Looks like the ole Ames High study hall here."

"I like the uppers anyway," said Jeep, tossing his musette bag onto the bunk above George's.

"There's an upper over here, Jim," said Eddie as he changed clothes. "I'm underneath here."

Jim pulled his bag to the south end of the west wall double-decker, leaned over, removed his shorts from the bag and commenced changing as Jeep did at the east end of the south bunk.

A shrill whistle was heard from down the hall.

"Carry gas masks," came the noncom's order. "You'll always carry your gas mask! Fall out on the north side of the building on the double!"

George returned from the bathroom in his shorts. Those who didn't already have a gas mask dangling from shoulder straps donned them.

"Did he say gas masks?" asked Eddie.

"They don't mean over your face, Eddie," said Jeep jokingly. "Leave it in the canvas bag and sling it over your shoulder. Unconscious Eddie."

"We are always to carry the gas mask," said George piously.

"Wonder why," Eddie murmured.

"Sergeant Pursuiti says so!" Jim quipped.

"Pursuiti looks like another fuckin' Mussolini," Jeep said laughing then caught himself. "Whoops! Sorry, preacher," he said to Jim. "We gotta watch our language from now on. We have a preacher with us."

"I should think so," Jim said in jest.

Jim had studied at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He and I shared similar facial features and in high school had occasionally been mistaken for one another. We left the room in ragged order, racing down the three flights of stairs, through the desolate hotel lobby and out a north door.

We stood with other GIs in the gulf beach sand that commenced at the sidewalk on the north side of the hotel. Three of the permanent party corporals ordered us to assemble into a formation. We got into four lines, facing north, spacing ourselves by extending our right arms to leave an arm's length between men. One of the corporals centered himself before our formation, facing us. The other two took up positions at each end of the formation. Each had a gas mask dangling from a shoulder strap. The center corporal assumed command.



"When you're ordered to attention, you'll hear 'Squadron . . . Ten-shun . . . or . . . Ten-hut. You'll brace, eyes straight ahead, arms down at your sides with the little finger touchin' the seem of your pants, shoulders back, suck in those stomachs, chests out, chins tucked in, heels together, toes turned outward at an angle. Your feet form a 'V.'

When we march we always lead off with the left foot! Remember that! *Left foot first!* Left . . . right . . . left . . ."

"Now, we're gonna march in formation. 'Squadron . . . Ten . . . hut!"

We braced with eyes straight ahead standing straight and rigid, almost afraid to breathe, as the corporals walked slowly between the columns inspecting each soldier, bellowing orders as they moved along.

"Chin tucked in . . . shoulders back . . . don't slouch . . . eyes straight ahead . . . suck that gut in . . ."

"Left face," barked the corporal in charge.

The "left face" order was obeyed by placing the right foot behind the left, turning on the left heel and ball of the right foot, then bringing the right foot over to meet the left so our feet formed a "V."

"Forward . . . march!" barked the corporal.

We stepped off with our left feet and marched through the hot sand toward the gulf water.

"Squadron . . . halt! One . . . two."

We obeyed the corporal's orders, stopping next to 6' x 6' wooden stand. Sergeant Pursuiti climbed up the side of the stand, taking a position at the center of the platform.

"Right face!"

We placed our right feet behind the left and turned right.

"At ease! Calisthenics will be conducted by Sergeant Pursuiti."

Having turned us over to the sergeant the corporal who had been in command, along with the other two, assisted the sergeant by forcing each of us to keep up with the calisthenics activity.

Sergeant Pursuiti stood, arms folded across his chest, looking down on us. He referred to ladies as "Tomatas," in his customary Brooklynese.

"Now, I spoze youze guys'r startin' to miss dem broads ya left back home. Dem tomatas all look alike when ya turn 'em up-side-down!"

Keeping up the chatter, the sergeant led the way, personally performing each physical activity he ordered us to carry out. We followed the tough sergeant's directions through the air corps hop, push-ups, sit-ups and a dozen or more additional body improving maneuvers as the bright Florida sun beat down on us.

After the hour long strenuous workout a corporal marched us to a cafeteria for noon chow.

By one o'clock eastern wartime we were back on the streets of Clearwater in formation, marching toward the obstacle course south of the city and singing "Alouette," a song the corporals had taught us. We followed that song



with one of the movie songs we had sung on the bus going to Camp Dodge a week before.

Each squadron was made up of four columns, 12 men each, 48 GIs in all. When the song ended the corporal ordered, "Double time . . . march!" We ran the remaining mile or so to the course. There we agonized to surmount a wide variety of physical feats designed to get us into top condition. While most of us awakened muscles seldom, or never, used to complete the course, Jim Warren relished the agony, completing the course ahead of everyone else.

The day's work generally followed the pattern set the very first day. First, we were awakened to the sound of "Reveille," a bugle call played over a loudspeaker system. We five Ames guys got out of our bunks, quickly made them up and crammed into the small hotel bathroom. As soon as we were in our shorts, gas mask kits over our shoulders, we bounded down the three flights of stairs, "fell in" to formation and marched to chow, or breakfast, at a nearby cafeteria. After chow, we were back in formation marching to the hotel. We listened for the corporal's whistle in the hallway, and immediately "fell in" on the north side of the hotel and went through a couple hours of close order drill. Around 10:00 a.m., the corporals marched us down the beach toward the blue gulf waters for calisthenics. Each day Sergeant Pursuiti mounted the stand and put us through our paces in the hot beach sand. Again it was Jim who outperformed all others as we strained to keep pace through the rigid air corps calisthenics.

Following calisthenics we marched to the cafeteria for noon chow, and then marched back to the hotel where we tried to get a couple minutes' rest on our bunks before that shrill whistle in the hallway again pierced our eardrums. Upon hearing the whistle we were up, straightening the bunk blankets so as not to fail an unexpected room inspection, bounded down the steps and fell in for the march to the obstacle course. If there was time before evening chow we got in more close order drill. After evening chow we were expected to study our military manual containing the "Articles of War."

We were all anxious to get mail but none had come. In the evening Jeep, Eddie and I ventured across the street into the Gray Moss Inn where there was a juke box. Although we had very little money each grudgingly dug into our pockets for a nickel. Eddie played, "Missed the Saturday Dance." I could see him and Carlene at the Sport Club in Nevada, doing the jitterbug. I also envisioned Betty and Bill Price, sister and brother from Ames, also performing their jitterbug version. A vision of guys and gals gathered around watching the jitter-buggers in action and enthusiastically clapping in rhythm with the big band music. The jukebox music briefly took us back home.

My nickel gave us a new Tommy Dorsey recording featuring Frank Sinatra as vocalist, "All or Nothing at All."

Before leaving the inn I spent a dime, buying a roll of peppermint Lifesavers and an almond Hershey candy bar at five cents each.



The next morning I slipped the chocolate candy bar inside the flap of my gas mask case so I would have a snack the minute Sergeant Pursuiti gave us a break during calisthenics.

The weather was hot and humid. Pursuiti finally allowed us to take a brief rest between calisthenics exercises. For over an hour our gas mask cases had lain on the hot sand with the bright sunshine beating down. Feeling hunger pangs I unsnapped the flap and reached inside, locating the chocolate bar. It was limp. As I tried pulling it out of the case chocolate oozed from the wrapper, spreading over the gray rubber gas mask and onto my hand. I cleaned my hand as best I could in the sand and snapped the flap closed, remaining hungry. Once back in the room I cleaned the mask and inside of the case. I never tried that again.

That evening we heard a corporal shout, "Mail call." Down the three flights of stairs we galloped.

We listened with great anxiety as the corporal called names he read from the envelopes. Finally we heard a familiar name.

"Private Edward T. Gibb," called the corporal.

We waited until the last name was called. Eddie had received a letter from his blue-eyed blond, Carlene Sharp. She had sent it by airmail from Nevada, Iowa. It folded into a flimsy envelope with short patriotic red, white and blue lines printed around the edges and bore a six-cent airmail stamp, twice the postage rate for regular mail.

Eddie lie on his stomach in his upper bunk reading his letter.

"Where were ya last night, Preacher?" Jeep asked Jim.

"Me?" Jim came back with a sly grin. "Oh, I don't know."

"You're going to get yourself in trouble staying out after bed check," George warned.

"Hey, guys," I interrupted. "How 'bout checkin' out that pub tonight?"

"We have the articles of war to memorize, remember," George instructed. "They're going to check us on them."

"I'm for checkin' the pub first," said Jeep. "George, you memorize those articles. If they call on me, you have my permission answer."

"Remain alert at all times and be especially watchful at night," I said, in a clumsy attempt to quote one of the articles.

"Eddie," called Jeep. "What's new in Nevada?"

"Yeah," said Jim. "What did she have to say?"

"Oh," Eddie murmured, "I dunno."

"Bring your comic book, Jim," I said. "We're goin honky-tonkin'."

We dressed in our khaki uniforms, with shirtsleeves buttoned and wearing neckties. The beach lounge was a short distance north of the hotel. We looked around as we entered. There were very few people inside so we had our choice of tables. Jim sat at a table, removed a rolled-up comic book from his khaki pants pocket and opened it. Jeep, Eddie and I joined Jim.

"Where's the juke box?" Eddie asked.

All but Jim looked around the huge lounge. He continued reading.



"We'll have to ask." I said casually.

We had been seated a few minutes when the bartender, a large middle-aged man, arrived at our table.

"What are you boys havin'?" asked the bartender.

"I'll have a 7-Up," said Jim.

"Beer," said Jeep.

"Draft?" the bartender asked.

"Sure," Jeep said.

"Me, too," I followed.

"Me, too," said Eddie. "Where's the juke box?"

"I have to play it from behind the bar," he said. "What d'ya wanna hear? One play for a nickel . . . six for a quarter. Whaddya wanna hear?"

"Oh," said Eddie, "nothin' . . . nothin' right now, thanks."

The bartender walked away.

"I like to see the music selection myself," Eddie mumbled.

"Me too," I agreed.

After a few minutes the bartender arrived carrying three large glasses of beer and the familiar seven-ounce green bottle of 7-Up on a small tray. He placed the drinks on the table. We each reached for one. Jim pulled the 7-Up bottle toward him.

"The beers are twenty-five . . . seven-up's a dime."

Jim dug down into his khaki pants pocket and came up with a dime that he handed to the bartender. The rest of us dug into our pockets for change and paid the bartender who quickly left with the empty tray.

"Can't wait for payday," I said.

"When is payday?" asked Eddie.

"I've told you before, Eddie," said Jeep. "The first. We get paid on the first. Then, to Jim and I, 'Eddie's unconscious.'"

Jeep joined Eddie and me sipping from the large beer glasses. The price of the beer held our consumption to one each. We listened to the distant jukebox music and talked about our obstacle course experiences. Jeep went into detail about Jim getting out ahead of the rest of us on the course and never looking back. Jim glanced at Jeep as he talked, smiled and went right back to his reading.

George was asleep in his sack when we returned to the hotel room just ahead of bed check. We left the overhead light out and got ready for bed in the dim light from the hallway.

"Where's the preacher?" asked Jeep, as he climbed into his bunk.

"He ain't up there," said Eddie, placing his feet up to press against Jim's upper bunk springs.

"Hmm . . . that's funny," I added, soon falling off to sleep.

The next morning saw us back in the bright Florida sun straining through Sergeant Pursuiti's calisthenics, then running several miles to the obstacle course, followed by an ambulance we referred to as the "meat wagon."



Occasionally a soldier dropped from the heat and humidity to be loaded onto the meat wagon and driven to a hospital.

After noon chow we gathered in the lobby of the hotel for mail call. The corporal called the names of other privates in the squadron. I began to wonder if the cards I'd sent from St. Pete reached my parents and Beverly.

"Private R. J. Clark," the corporal finally called. I stepped up and received an envelope from the corporal. It was from Beverly.

"Oh, R. J.," Eddie ribbed

After mail call we bounded the stairs, some with mail, some with none. I tore the end of the envelope away and removed the letter, lying on my belly in my bunk to read. Beverly's words took me back to the plant. The news there was that Paul Young was going with Clara.

"What's this 'R. J.' business?" asked Jeep.

The guys chuckled.

"R. J." said George. "Sophisticated."

"The gang back at the ordnance plant started that," I explained.

"I like it," said Jim. "Dignified."

"R. J. and Victor Eugene," said Eddie. "We're hobnobbin' with the elite."

Eddie often called Jeep "Victor," or "Victor Eugene" after hearing Jeep's full name called from roster after roster.

Jim Warren lived on the same street where Iona lived, just south of Ontario Road, and was among those of us who walked home on that gravel road after school. Jim informed us back then as we walked that he would attend Moody Bible Institute in Chicago after graduation.

"You missed bed check last night, Preacher," said Jeep, "in case you didn't know."

"You're going to get yourself in trouble," George warned, peering over his glasses toward Jim.

"Don't worry about me, guys," Jim said casually, comic book in hand.

The whistle sounded down the hall. I quickly shoved the letter in its envelope and slid it beneath the musette bag cover, at the end of my bunk. We straightened our bunks and raced downstairs to fall out on the north side of the hotel.

We assembled into formation. Each raised his right arm to exact distance between men. A corporal called the group to attention, marching us along the streets of Clearwater and leading us in singing the rousing "Army Air Corps Song," followed by the songs we had sung on the bus from Ames to Camp Dodge – a time that seemed ages before.

Back in the room after another hard day I re-read Beverly's letter, ending with "P. S. I still hear sleigh bells in the snow."

All of us took time to study the "Articles of War" booklet. George strived to outdo the rest of us on the military manual.

"You're gonna wear that book out, George," Jeep said.

"What chapter ya on, George?" Eddie asked.

"Bugle calls," George replied. "And, I know my bugle calls."



"There'll be a bugle call test, too, George," I said.

"I'm ready. I know my bugle calls"

Jeep, Jim, Eddie and I decided to test George's knowledge of bugle calls. At ten o'clock the "Call to quarters" bugle call sounded, followed by "Taps" at eleven when lights had to be out. After "taps" one of the noncoms (non commissioned officers) came around with a flashlight conducting "bed check."

The next evening we were on our bunks reading mail, writing letters, studying or polishing belt buckles for inspection. George had been sitting across from me on his bunk deeply immersed in his studying. Jim rested on an elbow in his upper bunk reading a comic book.

The bugle sounded "Call to quarters." Jeep, Jim, Eddie and I pretended to be undressing as if "Taps" had sounded. George, removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes, came out of his daze from reading and commenced catching up with the rest of us preparing for bed. He hurried into the bathroom. We remained in our fatigues, crawled into our "sacks" (bunks) and pulled blankets over us. Jeep reached the switch from his bunk and turned the room light out. George finished in the bathroom, turned the bathroom light out and hurried to his bunk. When he turned to face the wall I crawled out of my bunk. The other three followed suit. We picked up our shoes, stepped quietly out of the room into the lighted hallway and hurried down stairs. When we reached the lobby we put our shoes on, walked several blocks to our favorite bar, stayed about 45 minutes, arriving back at our hotel just before "taps" sounded. We removed our shoes in the lobby and climbed the steps. At the door of room 312, Jeep peeked in to make sure George was asleep. He turned and motioned for us to follow. We entered the room, quietly undressed and hit the sack.

At eleven o'clock taps sounded. George threw back his covers, got up, turned on the room light, grabbed his shaving kit and hurried into the bathroom, flipping on the bathroom light as he entered. Jeep, being closest to the room light switch, flipped it off. After finishing shaving George returned from the bathroom in the darkness.

"You guys better get up!" George warned. "We have to fall out."

"No, George," said Jeep. "That was taps, not reveille."

"I know my bugle calls!" George insisted.

"Better hit the sack before bed check," Jeep advised.

"Check your watch," Jim called from his upper bunk at the far end of the room.

George studied his watch in the dim light from the hallway.

"Well, how did that happen?"

"By God, George," Jeep scolded, "we were countin' on you knowin' those bugle calls."

"George," I chimed in, "I think you'll have it once you learn the difference between taps and reveille."



George ignored our barbs, put his shaving kit away and dropped onto his sack. A corporal stepped into the room throwing the beam of his flashlight from bunk to bunk and left without a word.

We finally completed six weeks of basic training. The strenuous calisthenics Sgt. Pursuiti put us through each morning, running to and from the obstacle course plus the grueling tests of the obstacle course itself left us in top physical condition.

On our last night in Clearwater the five of us Ames guys were in our room reading mail. Beverly's letter included the poem, "Let Me Count Thy Ways." Toward the end of the letter she noted, "I still hear sleigh bells in the snow." I started at the beginning and read her letter over again.

Jeep, lying on his belly in his upper bunk, looked over at Jim who was sitting on the edge of his bunk slipping a letter back into its envelope.

"Before we head out in different directions, preacher," Jeep said, "tell us where you've been goin' nights."

Jim jumped down from his bunk and slipped the envelope into his musette bag at the end of the bunk.

"Well," said Jim, smiling sheepishly and bowing his head, "I guess I can tell you guys now."

One by one, we turned from our reading to look at Jim.

"Did you guys know there was a pool table in the basement?" Jim asked.

"Basement?" Eddie questioned.

"I've never been to the basement," George said.

"Sergeant Pursuiti likes to play pool," Jim continued. "I play a pretty good game myself."

"You've been playin' pool with Sergeant Pursuiti?!" Jeep exclaimed. "No wonder you didn't worry about bed check."

"Well," George said quietly, "I guess it's who you know."

Jeep, Eddie and I strolled across the street east of the Harrison, making one last trip to the Gray Moss Inn. Eddie immediately put a nickel in the jukebox. Up came, "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

"Missed the Saturday dance," we three sang along with Peggy Lee and the famous Benny Goodman orchestra. "Heard they crowded the floor. Couldn't bear it without you. Don't get around much anymore."

Eddie leaned against the jukebox as if absorbing the big band vibrations. Jeep and I wandered away to pick out picture post cards to send our girlfriends and parents notifying them we had completed basic training and would be transferred somewhere. I bought a nickel almond Hershey bar and roll of peppermint Lifesavers for the trip.

As Eddie's final selection, "Elmer's Tune," played, he picked out post cards. I put my nickel in the jukebox and selected "All Or Nothing At All," by Frank Sinatra. We stood near the jukebox, placing our cards on a counter top to write.

Right after chow the next morning the five of us piled our barracks bags on the back of a GI truck. We climbed in the back of another truck and were



driven to the railroad station in St. Petersburg. My name was called early and I hurried to board the troop train. Soon, Jeep joined me inside. We opened the rail car window and listened for familiar names. GIs milled up and down the isle.

Outside a noncom called out the names from his roster. We heard, "James Marcus Warren." We saw Jim sling his musette bag over his shoulder and head for a distant rail car. Making his way down the crowded isle toward us was Eddie.



**Jim Warren and R. J. at Camp Crowder, Missouri, Spring, 1943. Jim shows off his corporal stripes after passing 15 words/minute sending and receiving Morse code.**



"We must be goin' to the same place," said Eddie. "I'm in the next car."

"Good!" said Jeep boisterously. "We'll be together then. R. J. and I promised your mom we'd look after you. They'd better keep us together."

"I don't know about Jim," I told Eddie. "His name was just called, but he headed way down the track."

"Never did hear George's name," said Jeep. "Better get back to your seat, Eddie, or ya may not have one."

"Yeah," said Eddie, starting up the isle, "see you guys later."

Our troop train headed north. We had traveled a full day and once again the sun was setting. Late in the next afternoon we learned our destination was Camp Crowder. We were told it was located in Missouri but neither Jeep, Eddie nor I had any idea in which part of the state. Of course, we hoped it would be close to Iowa.

Our troop train finally chugged to a halt. Musette bags over our shoulders, Jeep and I stepped down from the train that cold dark mid-March morning and commenced locating a truck carrying our barracks bags. A full moon shone in the black night sky dotted with fleecy white clouds. There were blotches of snow on the ground. A number of noncoms moved from place to place. Over the loud speaker system came a song I had never heard before, "Old black Magic." One of the noncoms called the roll. We assembled into a military formation. Jeep and I were in the same formation, but didn't see Eddie. As we stood on the rocky Missouri soil with that big bright moon above we were instructed as to what was expected of us. We Army Air Corps men were expected to show our appreciation for the hospitality of this Signal Corps camp.

We were again loaded on trucks and driven to a ground level wood building where we sat on the floor. A Signal Corps sergeant addressed us.

"You airmen are guests of the signal corps. You are here to attend radio school. Learning to receive and send Morse code could take any number of weeks. From here you will go wherever the Army Air Corps decides to send you. You will be eligible for brief passes. Busses take you to and from Neosho and Joplin, the nearby towns. The schedules are available at your orderly room."

A number of our airmen had questions for the Signal Corps sergeant. He finally asked, "Any more questions?"

"When's chow?" I asked.

"Yeah! Chow, chow, chow!" came the shouts from the GIs. I had obviously sneaked in the key question.

"Chow . . . you bet," the sergeant responded. "As I call roll you'll board the trucks waiting outside to take you to the mess hall. After chow . . . fall in outside the mess hall. The corporal will assign you to your barracks."

Jeep and I ended up in the back of the same truck and ate morning chow together.

After chow a corporal called the roll, assigning us to our barracks. Coincidentally, Jeep and I ended up on the first floor of the same building.



There were no double-decker beds as we had in Florida. Two other privates were assigned bunks between Jeep's and mine. We all commenced opening our barracks bags and hanging up the wrinkled clothes we pulled from inside the bags.

"I wonder where the other guys are," Jeep said.

"I dunno," I answered. "Eddie must be here some place. Thought we might see him at chow."

"Me, too," said Jeep. "We'll have to run him down."

We used the latrine and left for radio class. Both Signal and Air Corps soldiers assembled out on the main road, following the corporal's orders to line up twelve abreast, spreading across the entire blacktop road.

"Company . . . 'ten-shun!" the corporal ordered. "Forward . . . march!"

One of the airmen who had arrived with our group from Florida commenced singing. We air corps guys picked up the song. The signal corps GIs among us marched silently.

"Company . . . halt!" the corporal ordered. "One . . . two."

All in the formation took two final steps and stopped cold.

"I don't know how you were trained where you came from, but we do not sing in ranks . . . not in the Signal Corps! "Ten-shun! Forward . . . march."

We marched to school 12 abreast every morning in a formation that occupied the entire street. We airmen missed singing in ranks but marched silently west on a blacktop road that dead-ended at a north-south street. At that corner, on the opposite side of the street facing us, always stood a full army colonel, short in stature, sporting a dapper white mustache. He stood with feet apart at parade rest, hands clasped behind him carrying a black riding crop. Silver eagles glistened from the epaulettes of a dress coat the chest of which was plastered with medals. Behind him was a military band that always struck up "The Colonel Bogie March" as our formation approached the dead-end corner to make the "column right."

We got a morning and afternoon break so often headed for the Post Exchange (PX). We were allotted a certain number of cigarette packs. I bought the allowed number of cigarettes and turned them over to Jeep or others who smoked. I picked up my usual almond Hershey candy bar and roll of Lifesavers. One day, Jeep and I spied a familiar form draped over the PX juke box that was playing "Why Don't You Do Right?"

"Eddie!" I exclaimed.

"Hi, guys," Eddie replied.

"Where are ya?" asked Jeep. "Which company?"

"Company K . . . with Jim," Eddie replied, pointing across the room at Jim Warren making a purchase. Jim soon joined us, "Howdy, gentlemen."

"Here," said Jeep, taking a small white card from his billfold. "I'll give you guys our barracks number. We're in Company M. Come on over!"





**Five Ames guys on the porch steps of a Camp Crowder Post Exchange building. (double exposure) Top L to R: Bob and Chuck Dillon. At rail on steps: (top) Eddie Gibb, Jim Warren and (seen faintly) Jeep Wierson. Spring '43.**



Jeep asked the GI counter clerk for a pencil, jotted down our barracks number and returned the pencil.

"Have ya started school?" asked Jeep, handing the card to Jim.

"Yeah," said Jim, "Eddie doesn't like it."

"I notice you're playin' Carla's song," I said.

"Yeah," said Eddie. "Can't wait to get home."

"We're sure to get some kinda leave once we finish school," Jeep assured. "We're on break now."

"Yeah, guys," I said. "Gotta get back to class. Drop over."

"Eddie," Jeep reminded, "we promised your mom we'd look after you."

"Why doncha go to Joplin with us Saturday?" I asked.

"Sure," said Jeep as we walked away. "How 'bout after noon chow?"

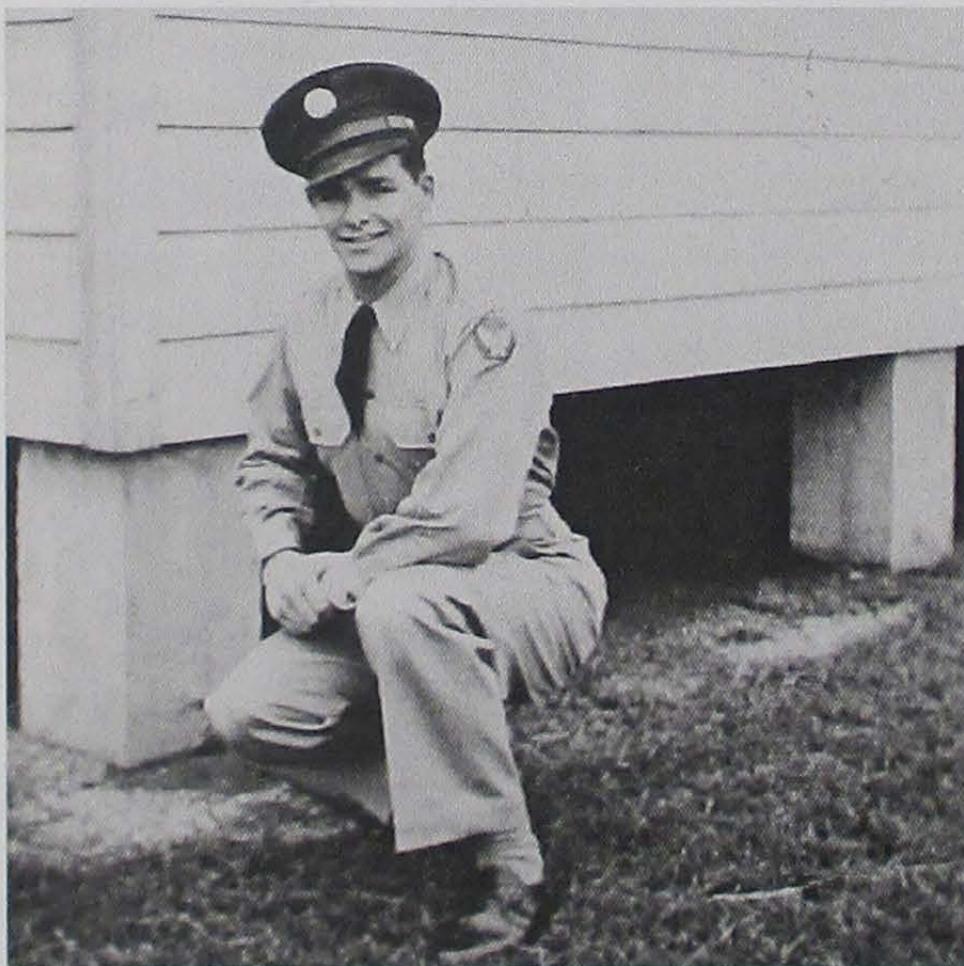
Unlike the small Florida hotel rooms, we now had footlockers to put things in and places to hang clothes. The footlockers were set out along the isle on the wood floor, one at the end of each cot. Racks for clothes ran along the barracks wall at the opposite end of the cots.

Expecting Eddie and Jim after chow that Saturday afternoon, Jeep and I hurried to get out of our fatigues and into our OD dress uniforms.

"Your palace, huh?" Jim asked as he and Eddie entered our barracks.

"Yeah," I came back, "they like the barracks nice and clean," adding a line from the song, "This Is the Army."

The four of us made bus connections to Joplin, the largest city in the area. We each had to watch what we spent. Mainly, we wanted to buy round flat top hats with bills in front, the type officers wore. They were not issued to us, but we were permitted to wear them with our dress uniforms.



We walked around downtown Joplin for a long time, looking in the show windows of various military goods stores, finally entering one. The prices of the hats made us hesitate. Each of us tried on various hats. We finally decided to let go of the cash necessary to buy one each. Then we scrounged enough to buy a set of silver air corps wings each to wear at the upper left of our OD coats or above the left shirt pocket.

We walked around downtown sporting our new hats and wings talking about taking pictures to send our parents and girlfriends.

We would have dropped into a tavern for a cold beer, but had already spent more than originally intended. We ascertained the lay of the land in



downtown Joplin, located a hotel where we would put the girls up if they ever came to see us, then boarded a bus back to the base. One of the guys in our barracks had a camera. We took pictures of each other outside the barracks in our new caps and wings. We couldn't wait for the pictures to be developed so we could order prints for sending home to our parents and girlfriends.

Ben Levine, a middle aged man of medium stature with soft brown eyes, slightly freckled face and black curly hair, occupied a cot next to Jeep's. One Sunday before noon Jeep and I were about to walk to the mess hall. I stopped by Jeep's cot. He was talking with Ben. I listened as Ben explained that prior to being drafted he had practiced law in Los Angeles. One of his clients was the popular movie star, Hedy Lamar. Ben opened his footlocker and there attached to the inside of the footlocker lid was a black-and-white professional photo of Hedy. It carried a hand written greeting to Ben and was signed "Hedy Lamar."

From the time we arrived at Company M, 804th Signal Regiment, Camp Crowder, Missouri, one of the things the men grumbled about was the lack of food at the mess hall. A very short time was allowed for lunch between classes. It was always a race to get our hands on the white dishes of food set out on picnic-type tables. There was always a white bowl containing some form of meat on the table and another containing boiled potatoes, but not enough for all the men at each table. There may be green beans, peas or some other vegetable, a plate of white bread, butter, gravy in a gravy boat and a drink.

We had to grab fast to get any meat or potatoes. Many times Jeep and I ended up with a spoonful of vegetables and a slice of bread with butter. That's all. We were constantly feeling hunger pangs and wanted to ask Jim and Eddie how they were doing on food. Being in another company, of course, they ate at another mess hall.

Jeep and I devised a plan. As we entered the mess hall for the noon meal between classes, it was an "every man for himself" scramble for the limited food. We had all experienced going away from the mess hall still hungry.

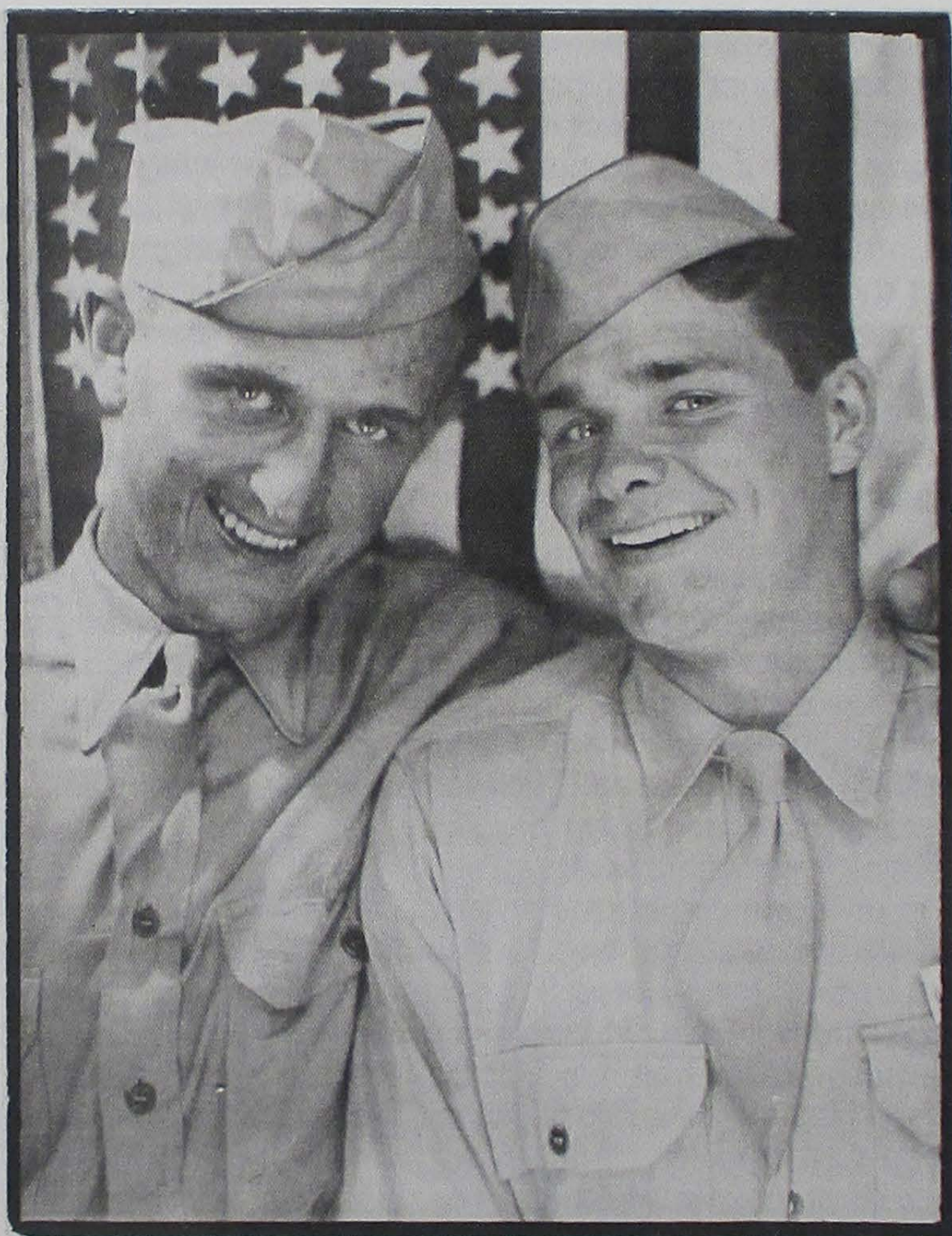
Brown colored cross-beams and rafters inside the huge wood ground floor mess hall building were exposed. The walls were the unpainted inner sides of the exterior siding boards with windows about every ten feet apart. Two-dozen wood picnic-type tables with attached benches were divided into two rows. One end of the tables butted against either the north or south wall. A six-foot wide isle ran east and west between the table rows. Five white plates, turned upside down about two feet apart with GI silverware beside them, lined the edges of the tables, allowing 10 men to eat at each table.

Rushing into the mess hall, we hurried to sit on a bench at an upside down plate, awaiting all the tables to be occupied. Once all the men were inside and seated, a noncom standing at the east end of the isle near the kitchen blew a shrill whistle, the nerve-wracking signal for us to turn the plates right side up and commence reaching for the food dishes. The meat, potatoes, vegetable and bread were always at the center of each table in



large white bowls. A small white gravy boat and butter on a white saucer were usually on the table.

The scheme Jeep and I came up with simply permitted us a split second advantage. First, we headed for an empty table; sitting at upside down plates located nearest the meat and potato dishes. The instant we heard that piercing whistle the others at the table commenced turning their plates right side up. As they were turning over their plates Jeep and I grabbed the meat and potatoes. Once those key food items were in hand we quickly turned our plates over with our free hands, helped ourselves from the dish in hand then exchanged the food dishes, assuring each of us a helping of meat and potatoes. We then exchanged the meat and potatoes with the other GIs for gravy, vegetable, bread or butter, all anxious for helpings of meat and potatoes.



**Camp Crowder, 1943, Jeep and Bob.**



From the time we entered the mess hall and applied this organized system we never went hungry.

On Sundays, the GIs often laid out in the sun on blankets to read and write letters. We were warned that GIs are government property and that one or more men on the base had been court-martialed for destroying government property by burning themselves while tanning. Jeep and I went ahead anyway and ended up with burns, never resulting in a court-martial.

The first of the month was payday. We were paid in cash in the mess hall. We stood in a long, slowly moving line leading to the mess noncoms doling out the bills and coins. We were informed on our first payday that each GI "donated" a certain amount of his pay to the "KP fund," to cover any breakage he may be responsible for when on KP. If a GI dropped a cup, plate, dish, or anything that hit the floor and broke, it was customary for the unfortunate GI to sign a "statement of charges" so the cost of the broken item could be taken out of his next pay. The mess noncoms doling out our pay explained that the "KP fund" took the place of the "statement of charges" procedure, since all were contributing a little bit to cover such accidental destruction of government property.

After "donating" to the "KP fund" month after month, I was scheduled for KP, and sure enough, while in the military dish washing process I accidentally dropped and broke a cup. The mess sergeant immediately presented me a "statement of charges" for signing. I refused, telling him we had all paid into the "KP fund" every payday to avoid that procedure. He claimed he didn't know anything about a "KP fund." I was forced to sign the statement, knowing money would be deducted from my next pay.

That afternoon, with our KP duties complete and waiting to be dismissed, I snooped around the kitchen, locating chunks of roast beef in a large aluminum container on a corner shelf under a large dishtowel. I glanced around making certain no one was watching, reached a large chunk of the beef, slid it into the left pocket of my fatigue pants, meandered out the back door and around the corner of the mess hall, looking back occasionally as I hastily ate the tasty roast beef.

I stepped back around the corner of the building out of sight as a red 1938 Chevy convertible, driven by an attractive young bleach blond haired lady, pulled up behind the mess hall. I peered around the corner. She opened her car door and got out, holding the door open. The mess sergeant hurried out of the back door of the mess hall carrying a slab of beef on his shoulder. The lady held the car door open and pressed the seat back forward as the sergeant plopped the beef onto the back seat and returned to the mess hall. Then one of the mess hall noncoms came out carrying a sack of flour. The lady again pressed the seat back forward. The noncom placed the flour sack near the meat and hurried back inside the mess hall. The mess sergeant and the noncom came out carrying a ten-gallon milk can they placed on the car floor behind the driver's seat. The lady released the car seat, walked around the car and got in on the right side as the noncom returned to the mess hall.



The sergeant quickly got in behind the steering wheel, backed the car down the dirt ruts of the narrow driveway and was gone. The theft had taken place before my eyes in a few fleeting minutes.

Back in the barracks that evening, fearing I was the only one on KP who had witnessed the food theft, I told Jeep what had happened.

"Well," he said, "that explains where our food's been goin'."

"I wonder if any of the orderly room guys know about this," I said.

"Could be," he said.

"I doubt if McKinney knows."

"Me, too."

"I had to sign a statement of charges."

"What?!", Jeep roared. "The 'KP Fund' covers that!"

"Well, I dropped a cup. It broke on the floor and the mess sergeant himself was right there with a 'statement of charges' form for me to sign."

"That crook!" Jeep shouted.

"I told him all of us had money deducted from our pay to cover anything that was broken – it went into the 'KP fund.'"

"He knows that!"

"He claimed he didn't know anything about that."

"This whole thing stinks to high heaven!" Jeep said. "Look, R. J., I know you're mad as hell right now, but I think we should make sure the orderly room crowd is not in cahoots with the mess sergeant before saying anything. Maybe some of the guys on KP saw what you did."

"I don't see how they could've missed it. We hadn't been dismissed yet."

Company M had been assigned a new company commander, a young second Lieutenant named McKinney. Jeep and I had joked with him about getting a three-day pass, even though we knew such privileges were not available to radio school students. We had also observed Lt. McKinney taking a few liberties himself, such as sneaking a girl friend into his orderly room office at night.

One evening, after returning to the barracks from school, I noticed a small piece of paper on my bunk. It contained a note informing me to report to the orderly room. I reported there.

"Lieutenant," called out the First Sergeant from behind the counter, "Private Clark's here."

Lieutenant McKinney came out through his office door, walked around the end of the counter, smiled broadly and met me in the center of the room.

"Clark," he commenced, "I've had a look at your service record. You performed as a ventriloquist before enterin' the service"

"Oh, sure . . . sir."

"Well, the company dance is comin' up in a few days. We need intermission entertainment. You're it!"

"Well, sir . . . I don't have a dummy."

"No dummy. Where's your dummy?"

"Home."



"Oh, boy! We really need ya for the dance."

"If I had the time I could build one."

"You could? How about workin' on that instead of goin' to P. T.?"

"Okay."

"Use any of the company facilities ya need."

"Thanks, sir." I said, quickly adding, "I need the right guy to help me. Wierson's is from my hometown. He helped me build the other one."

"Fine. Have Wierson work with ya. You guys can skip PT and go right to work on a dummy. Don't skip school, but you can skip everything else. Let me know if there's anything ya need."

"I'll see what they have in the mess hall we can use."

"Tell 'em I said to give ya anything ya want." McKinney concluded.

Back at the barracks, Jeep, suspecting I had been called in for some infraction of GI regulations, awaited a report when I returned from the orderly room. I explained Lt. McKinney's entertainment need and that I had volunteered his assistance in building a dummy.

"Ya got me off, too?" Jeep exclaimed. "Ya told McKinney I helped ya build the first one! That's rich!"

"Yeah," I added. "Well, we gotta attend classes, but we're dismissed from PT and everything else that comes up."

"And we gotta come up with a dummy."

"Oh, we'll do that alright," I assured Jeep.

"You've built one before. I haven't."

"We start with a head. We gotta find something that'll work as a head."

"How about a GI helmet?" Jeep asked. "Could we do something with one of them?"

"No, no. First, let's check in the mess hall."

"Oh, sure," Jeep said with a chuckle, "go right to your friend, the mess sergeant."

"McKinney said to use any of the company's facilities . . . that's the most likely place to locate what we'll need."

When the other company GIs were at P. T., Jeep and I walked down to the mess hall, stopped at the back door and knocked. After waiting several seconds a corporal opened the door.

"Lieutenant McKinney ordered us to construct a ventriloquist dummy for the company dance," I announced to any who would listen. "We may be able to use something you guys usually throw away."

The corporal stepped back, allowing us to enter. He repeated my message to the mess sergeant who was preparing to leave.

"Come in and look around," said the mess sergeant. "I'm leavin' but the corporal here'll help ya."

I walked into the mess hall kitchen followed by Jeep. The mess sergeant exited the door we had entered. The corporal, arms folded across his chest, strutted around behind us. We looked through the empty cardboard cartons piled near the back door then commenced scanning the kitchen shelves. I



spied a big yellow colored cocoa box sitting on a high shelf. It stood about 14 inches tall and measured about six inches across each of its four sides. The corners were rounded.

"Do you have an empty cocoa box like this?" I said, pointing to the one on the shelf.

"Oh, you can have this one," said the accommodating corporal. "I'll empty it."

He reached the cocoa box from the high shelf, emptied its contents into a small round crock that was sitting on the counter near the sink and handed it to me.

"What can ya do with that?" the corporal asked as he covered the crock with a dishtowel.

"Make a head," I said.

"Do ya think it'll work?" asked Jeep.

"Yeah," I answered. "We'll make it work."

"What about that neck thing you mentioned?" asked Jeep.

"Oh, Yes." I said. "Corporal, we need the core from a paper towel roll."

"Might look over there in them boxes," he answered, pointing toward the pile of cardboard cartons near the back door.

Jeep stepped across the kitchen to the pile and started tossing cartons aside to look under them. I joined him in the search.

"This is what ya want, isn't it? Jeep asked, pulling a twisted core from beneath a carton. "One in good shape, though."

"That's it. We may even use that . . . straightened out. We could tape it."

"There may be a better one in here," he said.

We continued pushing boxes aside and tossing others out of the way, finally spying one that appeared to be in good condition between two of the cartons. Jeep reached down and pulled it free.

"A gem!" he called out. "I can toss this one."

Jeep threw the twisted core back onto the pile of cartons. We both thanked the corporal, took the core and cocoa box and headed for the supply room.

A private first class (PFC) turned from his duties stocking shelves and moved in behind the counter to help us.

"Is the supply sergeant in?" I asked.

"Sure . . . in the office. Just a minute."

The PFC went to the office door, opened it and informed the supply sergeant we wanted to see him. He came right out and faced us across the counter. I explained we were carrying out a project for Lieutenant McKinney and needed some things, placing my written list on the counter in front of him. He leaned down to read the note and with two fingers of his right hand turned the note to read it.

"Hammer, saw, four penny finish nails, pliers, scissors, old GI clothing, including several sox . . . what are you guys buildin' . . . a scarecrow?" the sergeant jested.



"A ventriloquist dummy," Jeep responded. "This guy's a ventriloquist."

"No kiddin'!" said the sergeant, as if impressed.

"We have to have it ready for the company dance." Jeep continued. "He and the dummy will entertain at intermission."

"We'll look forward to that, won't we, Smitty?" the sergeant said to his PFC helper.

"Sure will," the PFC responded with enthusiasm. "Oughta be a lotta fun!"

"Give 'em what they need, but they'll hafta sign for those tools!"

"Oh, sure," Smitty answered.

The sergeant looked across the counter squarely at Jeep and me, hands on his hips.

"And, by God, you'd better bring 'em back, understand?" the sergeant bellowed.

"Yes, sir," Jeep responded.

"We only need 'em a few days," I explained.

"Now, for the old sox . . . there are loads of them back there on that corner shelf," the sergeant said in a tone that assured us of his support.

The PFC hurried to the corner for the sox.

While the other GIs were straining at PT Jeep and I commenced constructing a dummy. He read from my rough sketch for directions, measured with a foot long ruler and marked the sticks we had obtained from "supply" with a pencil at the points to be sawed. He placed them on the wood steps at the west end of the barracks, sawed them and nailed them together forming a frame that would be the dummy's body. He then padded the outside of the frame with GI clothing remnants, leaving an opening in the back for my hand to grasp the paper towel core that was yet to be applied.

I sawed the cocoa box off, saving the upper six inches to become the dummy's head. The remainder of the box was cut into short segments that we glued to the lower part of the cocoa box to form the lower part of the moving jaw. The paper towel core was reinforced by taping and then cut away enough to provide room for my right thumb to operate the string running through it up to the jaw inside the back of the head. One end of the core was glued to the lower part of the cocoa box head.

From small pieces of wood, Jeep and I carved ears and hands. We stuffed old sox into old sox to make arms and legs. We cut and sewed and cut and sewed to provide the little guy a miniature GI uniform. We attached a pair of GI shoes at the end of the stubby legs. I carved a nose from a bar of GI soap and glued it to the center of the box just above the mouth and painted lips, eyes, eyebrows and eyelashes.

We kept the dummy out of sight at the end of each day's work by placing him into a barracks bag. The night of the big dance Jeep slung the bag over his shoulder and we walked to the regimental recreation hall. We stood watching the other GIs dancing with the girls who had ridden to the dance in GI trucks from their homes in the nearby Missouri towns. Lieutenant McKinney walked over to us.



"You guys ready?"

Jeep lowered the bag from his shoulder, placing it on the floor. I leaned down, loosened the white cord, opened the bag and removed the dummy. When Lieutenant McKinney saw it, he released a wild laugh. The dummy rested on my left arm, his clumsy GI shoes dangling at the end of the stubby legs. I pushed my right hand inside the dummy's back to loop the string inside the neck core over my thumb.

"R. J. needs a chair to put his foot on, Lieutenant," Jeep said.

"Okay, guys," said the laughing officer. "I'll see to it."

"You'd better, Lieutenant," came the unexpected falsetto voice of the GI dummy, "or I'll fall on my ..."

Laughing hysterically, Lieutenant McKinney rushed to the back of the platform serving as a stage, picked up a chair, and carried forward it to a point near the microphone center stage. The crowd, noticing the activity, quieted. Jeep and I walked to the rear of the stage and waited.

"We have a little intermission entertainment for you guys and gals," Lt. McKinney shouted into the open mike. "Take it away, Private Clark."

With the dummy sitting on my left arm and my right hand inside his back I stepped onto the platform, walked to the microphone, placing my right foot on the seat of the chair and the dummy on my right knee.

"Hey, where are we?" squealed the dummy.

"This is the Company M dance," I came back.

"I'd like t' dance with that little blond over there?"

The crowd laughed.

"I think she's taken."

"Where's Lieutenant McKinney's girlfriend . . . hidin' in the orderly room?"

The GIs roared, some explaining the joke to their dance partners through their laughter. Lieutenant McKinney, fearing what the dummy may say next, made his way through the crowd and out of the building.

"I'm hungry," complained the dummy. "When do we eat?"

"You should've eaten at the mess hall," I said.

"I did! That's why I'm hungry!"

The GIs again burst into laughter, many turning to explain the mess hall situation to their ladies.

"All the good stuff ends up in that red convertible."

That brought the house down. Lieutenant McKinney appeared at the door, peeking in as if ready to exit rapidly if the dummy's remarks again focused on him.

"Ever see a car get loaded?!"

Shrill whistles, loud applause, shouting and laughter echoed throughout the huge recreation room.

"With . . . meat . . . spuds . . . milk . . ."

Thunderous audience response drown out the dummy's voice. After a few seconds the audience noise tapered off and the dummy continued.

"Have you guys donated to the KP fund lately?" the dummy shrieked.



Again the audience exploded. Wild applause, whistling and clapping rocked the dance hall.

"They steal from your pay and ya still sign a statement of charges if ya break somethin'!"

The GI audience continued to respond with applause, shouts, whistles and uncontrolled laughter. The dummy's jokes reverted to those with which I was familiar. He ended the performance with a brief song.

A reporter for the Camp Crowder Regimental newspaper, unaware of the Company M mess hall situation, interviewed me and wrote this account of the act:

### **Ventriloquist's GI Dummy Is Big Hit at Dance**

*"Doing the best he could with what he had," Pvt. Robert J. Clark, Co. M, 804<sup>th</sup> Sig. Regt., an amateur ventriloquist, last week whipped together a "GI" dummy for use in his act.*

*Pvt. Clark, called on to perform last Thursday night at a dance for Co. M in the 804<sup>th</sup> recreation hall, worked fast to find a substitute for the dummy he had left at his home in Ames, Ia.*

*An empty cardboard cocoa container from the mess hall became the head, and with a little red paint, ears and mouth were brushed on the box. A nose was molded of GI soap.*

*The supply sergeant provided a T shirt, dog tags, helmet liner and a discarded pair of fatigue trousers, which were rolled to the knees.*

*A slit was cut in the box for the "mouth." Incidentally it took half an hour to find a heavy rubber band which was used to control the dummy's lip movements.*

*Sticks from a packing crate were whittled for use as the dummy's insides. The insides are important, for by them are dummies made to swing heads to left and right.*

*The GI dummy received an enthusiastic reception at the dance when Pvt. Clark put on his act.*

*But the dummy born in this emergency soon will be discarded for Pvt. Clark's regular dummy is being shipped to him from Ames.*



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The next day Lt. McKinney called Jeep and I into the orderly room and on into his office where he asked us to close the door behind us.

"Congratulations on a terrific show, guys! You really came through for me"

"Glad to do it," said Jeep.

"Any time," I added.

"That dummy embarrassed hell outa me. I had no idea anyone knew."

"Sorry, sir," I said, laughing.

"Sure you are!" the Lieutenant said caustically. "Listen . . . I need to know one thing . . . that mess hall humor . . . based on fact?"

The three of us stood quietly a moment. I looked at Jeep. He looked back at me. McKinney looked first at one of us, then the other.

"Well . . . ?"

"I've never known that dummy to lie," I said with emphasis.

McKinney looked at Jeep, awaiting his comment.

"We've never known that dummy to lie," Jeep echoed.

In a few days we had a new mess sergeant. Rumor had it the former mess sergeant had been transferred. The food portions increased. Jeep and I dropped our "meat and potatoes" system. Nothing was ever again deducted from our pay for a "KP fund."

From the time we arrived at Camp Crowder, I had made trips to the orderly room asking about applying for the air cadet program. The First Sergeant and other orderly room noncoms, tired of my persistent questions, had fallen into a routine, "No word yet." Exasperated, I requested an appointment with Lt. McKinney on the subject.

I was notified of a time and date for my appointment with the Lieutenant. When the moment arrived, I was standing before McKinney saluting. He sat at his desk and abruptly returned my salute.

"Sir," I commenced, "I've been trying for some time to learn the correct procedure for applying to get into the aviation cadet program. I've asked here in the orderly room on a number of occasions, but haven't gotten anywhere. I really want to get into cadets, sir!"

"Well, you guys are already in the air corps. Shouldn't be much to it. Of course, being on a signal corps base, it may be a little tricky. I'll look into it, Clark, and let ya know," Lt. McKinney promised. "The minute I know somethin' I'll notify ya."

"Thank you, sir!"

I saluted. McKinney saluted. I turned and left.

Each time we saw Eddie at the PX (Post Exchange) he was playing the jukebox. He played "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Why don't You Do Right?", "Juke Box Saturday Night" and other big band songs. He leaned into the jukebox as he listened. His body slithered with the music. He sang along with his gravelly voice and talked of getting home to see Carlene.

"I told ya, Eddie," said Jeep. "Once we're through radio school we're sure to get some sorta leave."



"Oh, I'm not goin' to wait for that," Eddie came back.

"What else can ya do?" I asked. "We'd like to get home, too."

"Wash outa school. That way, I'll get a leave."

"Sure," Jeep exclaimed. "Then what? End up as cannon fodder! You'll be sent to the infantry!"

"That's what we heard," I said. "Wash outa school and that's where they send ya."

"Eddie," Jeep pleaded, "do you know the very last thing your mom said t' R. J. and me before we got on the bus at Ames? Now, listen . . . she said, 'You boys promise me you'll watch out for wee Eddie.'"

"I'll be okay," said Eddie lazily.

"Remember what we said about the infantry, Eddie." Jeep warned. "Those infantry guys don't get much trainin' before combat! What code speed are ya up to?"

"Ah-h-h . . . I'm not doin' too good," Eddie confessed.

"Unconscious Eddie," Jeep said futilely.

"Jeep and I both passed 10 words a minute," I said. "We all make corporal when we pass 15. You, too!"

"Yeah," Eddie replied, preoccupied with thoughts of getting home.

"I'm not kiddin', Eddie," Jeep pleaded. "A private in the infantry is nuthin' but cannon fodder. Your mom'll be devastated if somethin' happens to ya."

"We gotta get back to class," I said, glancing at the clock on the wall.

"Don't *you* hafta go to class?" Jeep asked Eddie.

"Pretty soon. I'm gonna play a tune here first."

Eddie turned to the jukebox, reading the selections. Jeep and I headed for the door.

"See ya later, Eddie," Jeep and I called back.

"See ya," he replied, slipping a nickel in the slot, then waving without looking at us.

Benny Goodman's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" resounded inside the Post Exchange building. Peggy Lee's vocal commenced, "Missed the Saturday dance . . ."

Jeep and I opened the door, hurried down the three wood steps outside the PX and walked swiftly toward our classroom.

"Eddie," Jeep said, "he's so unconscious!"

Jeep and I concentrated on passing 15 words a minute sending and receiving Morse code. Once past 15, we would commence receiving code on typewriters, called "mills" by the military, and sending with a "bug." We were told the typewriter was called a mill because its inventor's last name was Mill. The "bug" was similar to a code sending key, but had a longer rocker arm with a tiny metal spring at the tip resembling an insect.

Of course, we were interested in the promotion to corporal that came with passing the 15 word-a-minute test. It would increase our monthly pay a few dollars.



A letter from Beverly told of Grinny's marriage to Lieutenant Gene Badgley. Paul Young was leaving for the army. He and Clara were planning to be married.

I heard from Russ, who had gone into the army, as well as Dick Fargo from his Merchant Marine base at Sheepshead Bay, New York. Letters arrived from Millie, Sally and Edythe. I could hear the music so popular the year before when I was at the plant. Flashes of those days swam through my memory constantly, always ending with Beverly's face before me. I really wanted to get home.

One morning, Jeep and I raced to the PX during a brief break between classes. He needed cigarettes. I wanted to pick up an almond Hershey candy bar and roll of mint Lifesavers. I always bought my allotment of cigarettes and turned them over to Jeep. The song on the jukebox was just ending.

"Hey, guys, I got home!" Eddie cheerfully called from his familiar position in front of the jukebox.

"I'm a married man now!"

"You've been home?" Jeep asked. "That was fast!"

"Ya got married?" I asked with surprise.

"Congratulations!" Jeep and I said almost simultaneously.

"How's Carlene?" I asked.

"She's terrific!"

"How'r your folks?" Jeep asked.

"Couldn't be better. Everybody said to tell you guys 'hi'."

"Well, thanks," Jeep replied.

"Yeah, thanks," I echoed.

"Tell 'em 'hello' for us when ya write," Jeep said. "What happens to ya now, Eddie?"

"I dunno," Eddie confessed. "I'll be shippin' out any time. Gotta get back now."

"Shippin' out right away?" I asked.

We walked along with Eddie as he made his way to the door.

"And ya don't know where?" Jeep asked.

"Wherever the infantry sends me I guess. Mom'll know where I am."

Eddie opened the door and extended his right hand. Jeep slipped his right hand into Eddie's.

"We sure wish ya all the best," Jeep said emotionally.

Eddie reached his hand quickly toward me. Mine met his. We shook hands briefly.

"Bye, Eddie," I called, ignoring the sadness of the moment. "Good luck!"

"Thanks!" Eddie called. "You too, guys."

"Good luck, Eddie," called Jeep.

Eddie gave us a quick wave and closed the door behind him. Jeep and I hurried across the PX to a distant counter and made our purchases.

"Unconscious Eddie," said Jeep. "Wouldn't listen."

We never saw Eddie again.



A letter from Beverly brought news that sister, Marilyn, had gone to work at the ordnance plant. They moved into an apartment on Harding Road in Des Moines.



**DMOP (Des Moines Ordnance Plant) girls, downtown Des Moines, 1943. Second from left, with the black hand bag is Betty Price of Ames. To her left is Marilyn "Shorty" Barringer, Beverly's sister. Second from the right is Edythe Danielson.**



**More DMOP ladies. Left: Vivian Craig, center: Barbara ("Sally") Maring, right: Clara Walmer. 1943.**



Mom's last letter told of family plans to hold a Clark reunion Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, at Greenwood Park in Des Moines. The families of my Uncles Roy and Earl expected to join our family there for an afternoon picnic.

Jeep wrote his parents and Bettylou of our plans. Since his family had an extra car, Jeep asked his dad if he could drive their 1937 green Plymouth four-door back to Crowder. It was in need of a tire. I wrote Mom and Beverly that Jeep and I were doing all we could to get home the Fourth of July weekend, see our girlfriends and attend the picnic. I added a special note to Paul, asking if he could possibly find a tire for the Plymouth.

On the first day of July, Jeep and I entered the orderly room. Facing us across the counter was the first sergeant, a middle-aged dark-complected man of considerable stature. Jeep stopped to address him. I moseyed to the end of the counter where I spied a partially used book of blank passes.

"Oh, sergeant," Jeep said sternly, "we'd like to apply for a three-day pass."

"No three-day passes for students!" The big sergeant roared. "You know that!"

"Well, since the fourth falls on Sunday, are we off duty Monday?"

"Not on your life! The entire company's on bivouac all weekend."

"Yes, sir!" Jeep replied, turning to leave.

I joined Jeep at the orderly room door, following him outside. After we'd walked a distance from the orderly room I removed my hand from my pants pocket. In it were two blank passes good for traveling a fifty-mile radius from the camp. Of course, they lacked our names.

At the day room I used the typewriter to type in our names.

ENLISTED MAN'S PASS		
Clark, Robert J.	Pvt	37657275
(Name)	(Grade)	(Army serial No.)
is authorized to be absent from his post—Co M 804th STR		
		Camp Crowder, Mo
From	1700, July 3, 1943	
To	0900, July 5, 1943	
To visit	Des Moines, Iowa	
Signed	<i>Harry M. H. H. H.</i>	
	(OVER)	Company commander
LICENSE NO.		
85-9072 IOWA	Private Car	

**This is the 50-mile pass for going AWOL (over 400 miles)  
July Fourth week-end, 1943.**



Jeep passed the test for receiving and sending Morse code at 15 words a minute. I took the same test, but tightened up, scribbling some of the letters when receiving, so failed the test. The sergeant instructor explained I could attempt it again the next day.

We explained our plan for getting home and to a couple of our friends and asked if they'd mind answering roll call for us that weekend. They assured us they would cover for us.

Jeep had sewn corporal stripes onto a khaki shirt.

I took the code test again and passed. I figured I'd have time to sew stripes on a shirt during the train ride north.

We had planned to catch a train at Joplin Friday night. We would change trains at Kansas City, taking the train going to Des Moines.

Thursday evening the news spread that MPs would be checking passes and furlough papers at the Neosho and Joplin bus and train stations commencing Friday evening. We knew that when we purchased railroad tickets they would show Kansas City as our destination, far beyond the 50 mile limit of our unauthorized passes. Our plan for getting home had been derailed.

In the barracks after evening chow, Jeep and a couple of the guys were discussing the dilemma.

"What the hell'r we gonna do now, R. J.?" Jeep asked. "MPs'r gonna be checkin' papers at all the terminals Friday night."

"Leave Saturday night," I said with confidence.

"Saturday night . . ." Jeep contemplated

Late Saturday afternoon Jeep, his new corporal stripes rippling on his khaki shirtsleeves, and I, caught a bus at the camp gate. Carrying only our shaving kits, we got off the bus at the Joplin railroad station.

We understood fully that being picked up by MPs (military police) and charged with being away without leave (AWOL) would mean jail time, or "stockade time," in military terms.

Luckily, we saw no MPs at the Joplin station. We bought one-way tickets to Des Moines and boarded a train that pulled out immediately for Kansas City, nearly 200 miles away. At Kansas City, we would have to get a train going to Des Moines.

We arrived at the big Kansas City railroad station about 10:00 p.m. It was filled with servicemen of all branches as well as a number of MPs and SPs. (Shore Police for naval personnel and U. S. Marines)

Jeep and I, carrying our shaving kits, walked across the concourse of expansive Union Station searching for a Des Moines bound train track number.

Suddenly an announcement was voiced on the loudspeaker system.

"Attention . . . all military personnel! Have your furlough papers ready! MPs and SPs are checking furlough papers at the center of the concourse. Have your furlough papers ready!"



Our stomachs sunk. We stopped dead still, eyeing the lines forming in front of MPs and SPs standing at the center of the big marble terminal floor.

Jeep, teeth clenched, pounding his fists against his hips, looked down at me and quietly asked, "What . . . the . . . hell . . . do we do now?"

"Follow me," I said, starting toward the nearest MP.

Jeep followed. I walked up to the MP, tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "Sergeant! Where do we get the train to Omaha?"

He turned to the MP standing to the right of him checking papers.

"Where do they get the train for Omaha?"

"Oh," said the second MP quickly, "Uh . . . that's track 23."

He turned and pointed to one of the gates in the distance.

"Thanks," I said.

Jeep and I walked rapidly in the direction the MP had pointed. We exited the rotunda. Once outside in the dim light of the rail yard we changed directions in case the MPs had second thoughts. We crossed a number of railroad tracks and spied a colored conductor walking alongside a parked train.

"We're looking for the train to Des Moines," Jeep called.

"It'd be on north there," came the conductor's reply.

"About three setsa tracks over," he followed.

In the near darkness we did see that he was pointing.

"Thanks," said Jeep. "At least we're headed in the right direction."

We stepped across two sets of tracks. The third set was occupied by a train with no lights on inside. A colored conductor came down the set of steps at the end of the last car and stood on the brick platform.

"We're lookin' for the train to Des Moines," I said.

"Right here," the conductor said, wiping his cloth over a red light lens at the end of the car.

"Oh, good!" Jeep and I said simultaneously.

"Be a while 'fore they start to board," the conductor continued.

"We already have our tickets," Jeep said.

"Go on in if you want," said the conductor.

"Thanks," we said, one echoing the other.

"Might as well get a little rest," the conductor said. "You boys deserve to rest when ya can."

We climbed the steps and entered the dark empty rail car, happy as larks to have come upon a friendly host who was really offering us a place to hide. I plopped down on a seat. Jeep sat across from me looking out the wide window over the myriad of rails. He got up and walked back to talk with the conductor. I fell asleep.

Later I felt something nudge my left shoulder. I awoke and realized it was Jeep nudging me. I slid over. Jeep sat down next to me. The lights were on in the rail car and the other seats were occupied. The train surged forward.

"Have your ticket ready, R. J." said Jeep.



The conductor slowly made his way down the isle. I unbuttoned my shirt pocket flap, removed the ticket and buttoned the pocket flap back down. The conductor finally reached our seat and took our tickets.

"What time is it?" I asked.

The conductor reached into a vest pocket of his dark blue uniform, removing a watch at the end of a chain, flipped its lid open and said, "20 minutes to one."

"Thanks a lot," I said.

He snapped the lid closed, slid the watch back into his vest pocket and made his way on down the isle.

"Did he say what time we get to Des Moines?" I asked Jeep.

"About 10," Jeep said.

"I can sew my stripes on in the daylight," I said, dropping back on the seat and drifting off to sleep.

Our train made a number of stops at northern Missouri and southern Iowa towns for the locomotive to take on water and coal early that Fourth of July morning in 1943. When I awoke, Jeep was not in the seat next to me. I glanced out the window. It was shortly after dawn. The thought of seeing my family and Beverly in a few short hours brought a rush through my stomach. Jeep came down the isle toward me carrying his shaving kit.

"I've already been to the latrine," Jeep said. "There's no line now. You go. Then we'll check out the dining car."

I followed his timely instructions without a word, standing to remove my shaving kit from the overhead rack.

After a more dainty breakfast than we were used to, we returned to our seats. I removed my shirt and dug into my shaving kit for corporal stripes, thread and needle. In a few minutes the strips were attached to my khaki shirtsleeves. I stood up and put on the shirt.

"They look good, Corporal," Jeep said, smiling. "Like they've been there for years."

"Thanks, Corporal Wierson," I said. "Hope the girls are impressed."

Approaching the southern outskirts of Des Moines, we heard the mournful wail of the locomotive's whistle and constant dinging of its bell. I wondered if Beverly could hear the whistle far across the city. The train moved slowly, finally reaching the railroad station we had left the last day of January in the deep cold and snow. This Sunday morning was bright and sunny, promising a hot day.

At the depot ticket office we got instructions for taking streetcars. He would ride to East 14<sup>th</sup> and Euclid, the "hitchhiking corner" on Highway 69, where he could get a ride to Ames. Once he got home, he was to phone Bettylou and arrange to see her. He would also telephone Paul at our farm to see if he had been able to locate a tire for the Plymouth we intended to drive back to camp that night. Early in the afternoon Jeep would drive to Beverly's apartment, pick us up to join the Clark picnic.



I was told to take a streetcar from a corner near the railroad station in downtown Des Moines with the front sign that read, "Harding Road." I knew Harding Road was in the north central part of the city. I got on the trolley, deposited the necessary coins in the square glass box by the driver's seat and told the conductor the address I wanted to reach. He indicated he would notify me when to get off.

The repeating thrill of the moment rippled through my stomach and sent sensations throughout my body. I hadn't seen Beverly in what seemed a lifetime. I thought back to the last time I saw her, January 31<sup>st</sup> that year. She and Ginny met me at the Camp Dodge day room where we said, "Goodbye."

"Next stop's yours, Corporal," the conductor said.

I looked around to see if there was another soldier on the car.

"You," he said, looking up into his huge mirror where our eyes met. "Your stop's comin' up."

"Okay!" I said, remembering my new stripes. "Thanks!"

I stood, shaving kit under my left arm, balanced myself on the swaying floor and made my way to the chrome pole near front door of the trolley. I wrapped my right arm around the pole. The wheels ground noisily on the rails as the streetcar came to a stop.

"It's on north there," the conductor continued, pointing. "West side."

"Thanks a lot," I replied. "Thanks for all your help."

"Have a good Fourth, Corporal," the conductor said as he pulled the handle folding the door to open.

"Thanks," I said. "You, too."

I glanced along the rows of seats. People were smiling at me. Some even waved, as if to support the conductor's good wishes. They seemed to appreciate the simple fact I was a soldier. The new experience gave me a warm feeling. I released my hold on the pole, waved back, turned, stepped down the three worn steps and out onto the brick street that was Harding Road. The door closed. The trolley's electric motor gained momentum. With the clickety-click of the wheels the streetcar pulled away.

I walked across to the west side of Harding and hurried down the sidewalk north to the apartment building address Beverly had mailed me. I climbed the white concrete steps, pulled the large wood door with its decorative window open and entered the lobby, located the marble stairs, ascended to the second floor, located the apartment number and knocked loudly on the door. I was breathing heavily. My heart pounded wildly. I waited and was about to knock a second time when the door opened. There stood Beverly! My shaving kit slid down my leg to the floor. I wrapped both arms around her. She held me tightly. Her lips met mine. We stood in the doorway locked in each other's arms a long time. She wore a chocolate colored slacks suit with short sleeves. I stroked the long honey colored hair that fell to her shoulders.

"I still hear sleigh bells in the snow," Beverly whispered.



"Oh, yes!" I said softly. "So do I!"

I picked up the shaving kit. We stepped inside and closed the door. Those bright sparkling blue eyes and warm smile continued to melt me. Beverly explained she was home alone as the young lady who shared the apartment was away.

The windows along the east wall looking out on Harding Road were wide open. Soft breezes came through the screens, rippling the drapes at times, helping cool the apartment on that hot, humid Iowa summer day.

"You couldn't get away Friday?" she asked.

"No," I said, "It's a miracle we made it at all. That's a long story."

The time swept by. Beverly prepared a Jell-O dessert for the picnic. As 2:00 p.m. approached, I looked out the window for Paul and Jeep. Paul knew where Beverly lived. He had delivered a radio of Dad's to her several days earlier. When the light green 1937 Plymouth appeared, I carried the dessert downstairs. Beverly and I met the car as it pulled up.

Paul had found a tire. He and Jeep mounted it on the car. Jeep drove as Beverly gave him directions to Greenwood Park. I held the dessert dish in its sack on my lap.

Once at the park, we looked first in one area, then another, finally locating the family. Although it was a hot day with bright sunshine, the breeze through the green trees had a cooling effect. Beverly met my Uncle Roy, Aunt Grace and their son, Wendell, who was 13, Dan's age. My Uncle Earl, Aunt Bess and cousin Harry had driven over 50 miles from Chariton. Aunt Jessie and cousin Dicky Lee, of Russell, also attended.

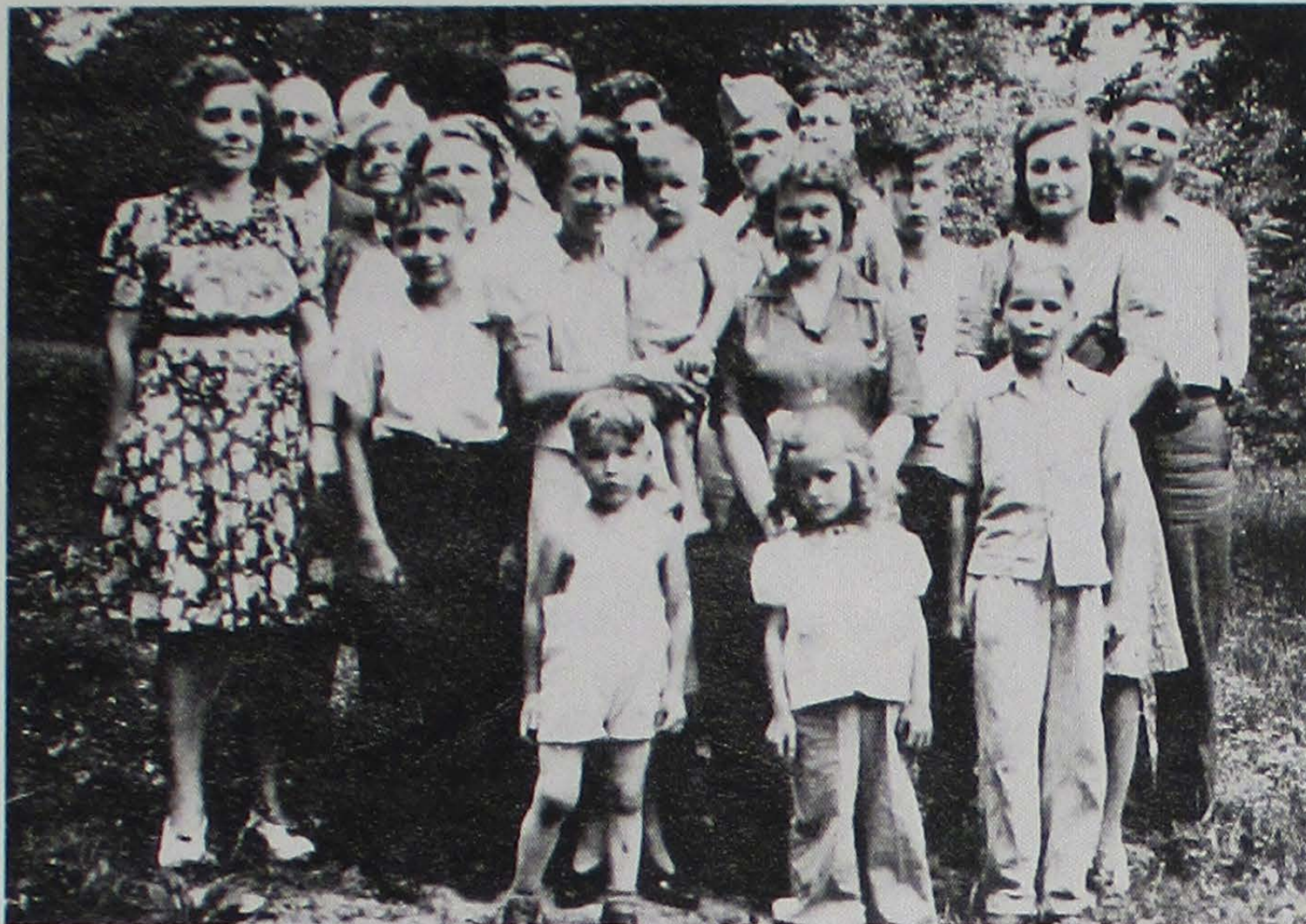
Beverly hadn't seen Mom and Dad since the cold January morning they drove her from the corner, where we boarded busses for Camp Dodge, to Edythe's apartment in east Ames.

Beverly's pleasant friendly manner, warm smile and sparkling blue eyes made her an immediate favorite of my younger brothers and sister. I attempted to name each for her, but they noisily interrupted, pulled her by the hands in various directions and at times clung to her legs. Ten year-old Phil snatched Jeep's cap, donned it and sneaked into a picture Jeep took of Beverly and me sitting on a blanket. Cute little five-year old brown-eyed Kay with her pretty long blond hair quickly became Beverly's buddy. Kay told Beverly her sixth birthday was coming up the next month. Beverly would remember.

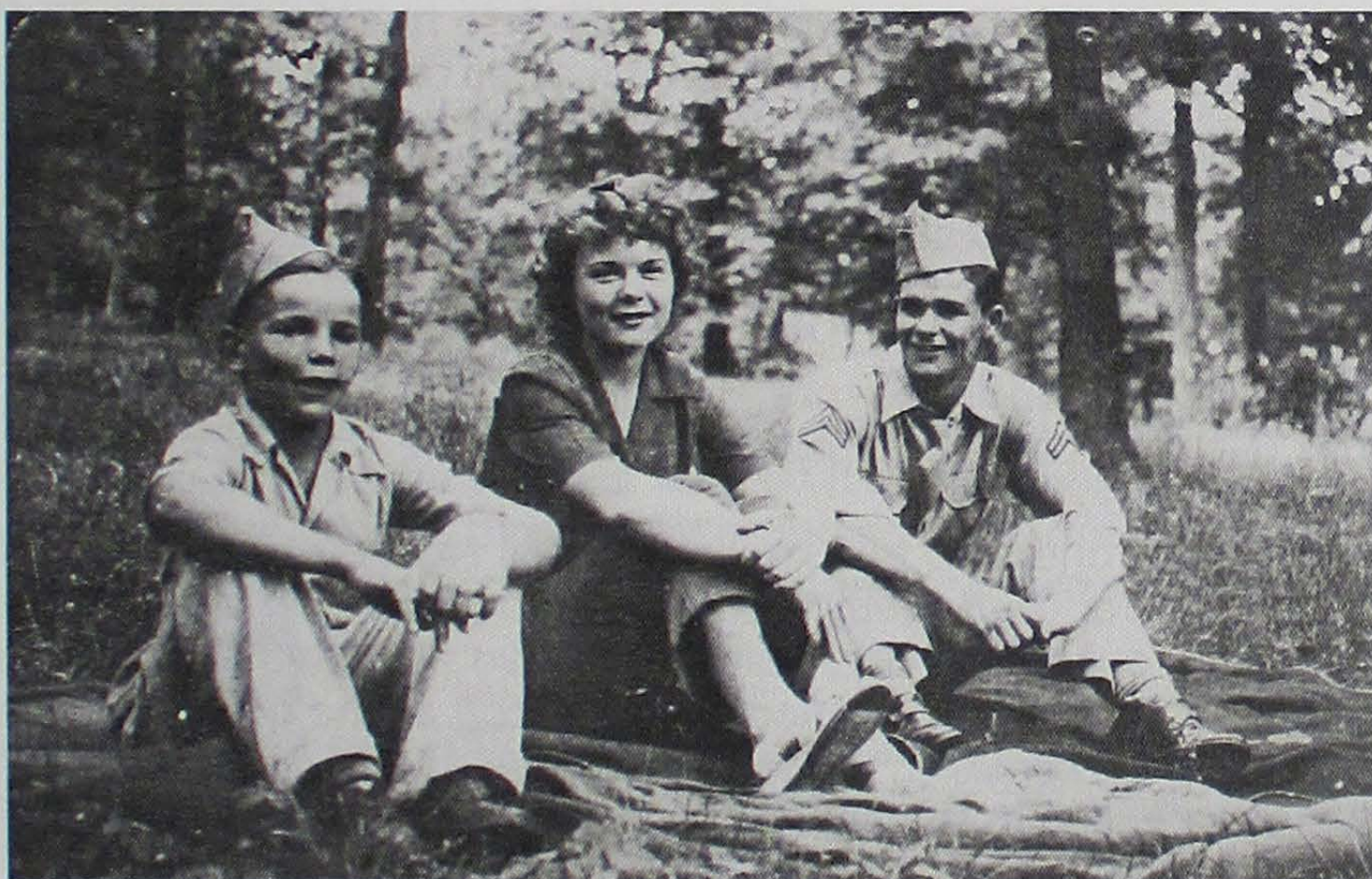
Uncle Roy always had good cameras. A number of pictures were taken that day. Jeep took a group picture that included Beverly.

Paul would ride home with my parents. Jeep and Bettylou delivered Beverly and I to her apartment. They drove to Ames. He would return for me in the evening and we would start back to Camp Crowder.





**Jeep took this picture of the Clark family gathering at Greenwood Park in Des Moines, Iowa, July 4, 1943. (Jeep and R. J. were AWOL from Camp Crowder) R. J. (wearing GI cap) is behind Beverly. Phil Clark (10 years old) is at Beverly's left.**



**Phil Clark (wearing Jeep's cap), Beverly, and R. J. at Greenwood Park, Des Moines, July 4, 1943. The corporal stripes had been sewn on shortly before.**





**Beverly, R. J., Jeep and Bettylou Comstock at the Clark picnic, Greenwood Park, Des Moines, Iowa, July 4, 1943.**

Being alone in the apartment with Beverly was pure heaven. The world seemed so far away. We wanted the tranquility to never end, but our precious time together soon expired. Jeep was at the door. I kissed Beverly goodbye and picked up my shaving kit. The three of us quickly discussed the possibility of Beverly and Bettylou making the trip to Joplin later in the summer. Jeep and Beverly said goodbye. He walked on ahead. Beverly and I embraced. I kissed her one last time.

"I'll always hear sleigh bells." She said quietly.

"Oh, yes. Me, too. And, I'll write."

I walked out the door, bounced down the marble stairs and caught up with Jeep in the lobby.

He had to make one stop before leaving Des Moines. His sister, Edith, about two years older than Jeep, lived with a roommate in an apartment on the route we took out of the city. Edith and I had attended a summer school class a couple years earlier. We made a brief stop at the girls' apartment where the discussion centered on Stanley and Archie, two of the Wierson brothers who were also in the service. After a brief visit with Edith and her roommate, Jeep and I hurried out to the car for the trip south.

"Oh, I forgot to ask," Jeep commenced when we reached the car, "did ya get any gas stamps?"

"Dad didn't have any," I replied "Did you?"

"Nope. Me either. I don't know what we'll do."



Jeep drove to a service station along highway 69 on the south side of Des Moines. I hurried from the car before an attendant could come out to wait on us. A dark haired middle-aged lady met me at the propped open door.

"Ma'am," I said quite confidentially. "Could you possibly help us? My buddy and I have to be back at Camp Crowder, Missouri in a few hours. We don't have gas stamps. We have the money for the gas, just no stamps."

"Let me see what I can do," she said, reaching a cigar box from a shelf.

She opened the box. I could see it contained rationing stamps.

"My husband and I own the station. It's not as if we have to answer to someone else . . . except Uncle Sam, of course. There should be a few extra here."

She closed the cigar box lid, put the box back on the shelf, turned and walked out the open door. I followed her to the two gas pumps. Jeep was squatting to look at the tire he and Paul had mounted.

"Ethyl or regular?" she asked, removing the gas cap and setting it on the back bumper brace.

"Oh, regular," Jeep called, rising to stand by the car.

The female filling station operator reached the little crank on the side of the "regular" pump, turned the meter back, removed the gas hose from the side of the pump, flipped the pump lever and shoved the hose nozzle into the Plymouth's gas tank opening. The three of us watched the gas meter numbers climbing.

"How many gallons?" she asked.

"Fill 'er up," Jeep replied.

"How far do you have to go?" she asked.

"Oh," Jeep calculated, "around four hundred miles."

"You'll have to stop for gas again," she warned.

When she had filled the tank, the lady replaced the hose to hang on the side of the gas pump, walked to the rear of the car, picked up the cap and twisted it onto the tank opening.

Jeep and I removed the wallets from our pants pockets.

"Come on inside," the lady directed.

She walked back into the station. Inside, Jeep and I came up with the exact amount to pay for the gas. He handed it to her. She rung up the sale on her cash register, placed the money in the drawer, closed the register drawer, reached into the cigar box, removed several rationing stamps and handed them to Jeep.

"You'll need these," she said.

"Thank you," Jeep said, my "thank you" echoing his.

"This is sure appreciated," Jeep assured her.

"Hope we haven't shorted ya." I said.

"You guys change off drivin', now. Don't go to sleep at the wheel."

"Yes, ma'am," we said in unison.

"It's a good thing he drove in here," I said. "Thank you very much!"

"Good luck!" she said as we hurried out the door. "Come back!"



"You drive," Jeep said as we neared the car. "I'm gonna get some sleep."

He opened the right back door, got in and closed the door. I hesitated at the driver's door to check the time. A pink neon tube circled the clock on the outside of the filling station. It was nearly 10:00 p.m. The 35-mile per hour wartime speed limit was about to be stretched. When we reached Kansas City, Jeep was asleep in the back seat.

"D'ya think those MPs are still looking for us?" I quipped loudly, waking him.

He sat up and looked around.

"Is this K. C.?" he asked.

"Yeah, we don't wanna miss an open gas station."

"It's just like you, R. J., to tap an MP on the shoulder 'n ask where there's an open station."

We both laughed.

"Yeah," I said, chuckling, "and what if he says, 'track 23 ?'"

"Oh," Jeep said seriously, "we gotta look for highway 71, too."

We kept an eye out for highway signs and filling station lights, looking down each dark street as we crossed intersections. We reached the south side of the city and hadn't seen an open filling station. We were still on Highway 69. Jeep crawled over the back of the seat to sit on the passenger side of the front seat.

"How much gas do we have?" he asked.

"The gauge shows between a fourth and a third," I calculated

"We'd never make it on that," Jeep said.

Suddenly, crossing an intersection, we looked left down a street to see lights. I made a left, drove two blocks and pulled into a filling station on the right. The station appeared to be closed with just its nightlights glowing. Jeep got out and went to the door. An older man was asleep inside. Jeep pounded on the locked door, waking him. The man followed Jeep back to the car.

"Where do we get 71 goin' south?" Jeep asked as the man gassed the tank.

"Two blocks on east here," he said, pointing with his free hand, "the way you're headed. Ya turn right up there."

"Thanks," Jeep said. "Two blocks . . . lucked out again."

We paid the man. Jeep removed the rationing stamps from his shirt pocket, slowly and carefully dispensing the correct number. I looked for a clock, finally spying one on a wall inside the station.

"I'll drive now," Jeep said.

"Their clock says just about two-thirty."

Jeep got in behind the wheel. I opened the back door and slid onto the back seat. Jeep's door closed, then mine.

"Not bad on time, huh?" Jeep said.

"Should make it in time for roll call," I calculated. "I held it at about 50."

"If we get pulled over," Jeep said chuckling, "I'll let you do the talkin'."



I woke up from time to time, looked out in the Missouri darkness and dropped off to sleep again. When the car finally came to a stop, I awoke to see we were in downtown Joplin. It was dawn. Jeep turned to drive east, heading for Neosho, the small town near the base. I climbed over the seat to sit in front. The sun came over the horizon nearly blinding us.

"Good sleep?" Jeep asked.

"Not bad. I kept wakin' up to make sure we were still between the ditches."

"I just thought of somethin'," Jeep said. "We don't have a base windshield sticker."

"Let's tell 'em at the gate to give us one."

We drove through Neosho and on to the gate at Camp Crowder. Jeep rolled his window down and slowly coasted to a stop. An MP carrying a flashlight stepped out of the guard booth on a concrete island.

"Do you issue the vehicle windshield stickers here?" Jeep asked with authority.

"You'll have to apply at your orderly room," said the MP, leaning down to shine his flashlight beam through the window of the back door.

"Thanks," Jeep snapped, "I'll do that."

Not waiting for the MP to say anything more, Jeep stepped down on the clutch pedal and shoved the gearshift into low. The MP straightened up and stepped back. Jeep pressed down on the foot feed. We drove onto the base.

Upon reaching our barracks Jeep parked on the east side of the building. Carrying our shaving kits we rushed inside, changed into fatigues and hurried across the camp to the field where GIs had commenced arriving from two days on bivouac. Our friends soon arrived who would have answered roll for us as they had when the company left.

We mingled with the GIs returning from bivouac, thanked the guys for answering roll call for us while we were away and reiterated our willingness to return the favor any time. The sergeant in charge of the bivouac called the roll, releasing each man as he answered. Several names were heard, then "Clark." "Here!" I shouted. It took some time before we heard, "Wierson." Jeep called out, "here," and we headed for the mess hall. We had last eaten a meal at the family picnic in Des Moines.

After morning chow, we walked to class. The sergeant instructor informed Jeep and me that since we had passed 15 words a minute, we would be working on high-speed code. That meant taking code at higher and higher speeds on typewriters. Previously, we had printed on paper using pencils when receiving Morse code.

A device called a "bug" enabled us to send code at high speeds. The name came from the tiny spiraling wire spring with a cat whisker at the end of a pencil-like shaft. Brief contact of the cat whisker with a small post on the base of the keying apparatus opened and closed an audio circuit, providing audible dots and dashes. Our assigned goal was passing a 20-words-a-



minute sending and receiving test. A word consisted of five alphabetical letters, or "characters," as they were called.



**R. J. takes Morse code from a field radio receiver while on bivouac with Private Haynes, summer, 1943.**



That weekend Company M was back out on bivouac. Jeep and I answered roll call and started running at the blast of a whistle. When we heard the whistle again, a hundred or more of us hit the ground, rolling over the Missouri rocks on our stomachs. Our gas masks dangled from shoulder straps, taking a beating as we hit the dirt. We waited for the whistle, got up and ran forward, dropping to the ground upon hearing the whistle again.

Arriving in the woods, we took cover upon hitting the ground by rolling under fallen tree branches, covering ourselves with leaves or anything we could use as camouflage. Jeep and I had gotten separated. At the end of the running and dropping sequence I looked for him, but was quickly matched with another radio school friend named Haynes. We were assigned a command car containing radio equipment to drive during weekend maneuvers. Haynes and I took turns transmitting and receiving coded messages, assimilating infantry combat communications.

In radio school, both Jeep and I had mastered the bug and mill, passing the code receiving and sending test at 20 wpm. We commenced practicing at 25. We would take the test at that speed once we felt we could pass it.

Mail from our girlfriends was welcomed. Beverly had sent my little sister, Kay, a fragrant soap assortment for her sixth birthday coming up on August 22<sup>nd</sup>. Beverly and Bettylou had been in touch with each other and were planning a trip to southwest Missouri Labor Day weekend. I heard sleigh bells in the snow!

Jeep and I rushed to the orderly room, putting in for three-day passes and picking up the windshield sticker for Jeep's Plymouth. A few days later we entered the crowded orderly room to see if our three-day pass requests had been approved, only to be informed Company M would be on bivouac Labor Day weekend.

We had anticipated such obstacles and went right to work. I remained at the end of the counter near the door to attract attention away from Jeep who worked his way through the crowd to the far end of the counter where the blank pass forms were kept.

"Sergeant," I shouted, "did Lieutenant McKinney get any word about applying for air cadets? I've asked several times about that!"

My rude approach had quieted the bustling crowd. All eyes were on the hulky first sergeant, leaning over the counter, his eyes riveted to mine.

"God knows you've asked and asked and asked!" the first sergeant bellowed in disgust. "If *he* gets word, *he'll* letcha know! Isn't that what *he* told ya?"

"Oh, sure," I agreed. "I'll check later!"

"No," he shouted, "don't check later! I said, '*he'll* let *you* know!'"

"Ya, thanks, sergeant," I said, tossing him a quick two-finger salute.

"Who's next here?" he said gruffly, taking up another GI's question.

Jeep winked as he made his way back through the crowd toward door. The temporary distraction at my end of the counter had diverted the



attention of the noncoms behind the counter, allowing Jeep to snatch the blank three-day pass slips we needed from the other end of the counter.

In radio class the next morning Jeep and I glanced around, making certain no one was looking, slipped the pilfered pass forms into our typewriters, typed our names and dates we would be away on the appropriate lines, removed the forms and slid them back into our fatigues shirt pockets. Later we would forge Lt. McKinney's name on the lower line as authorizing officer. We figured that if we were caught, we'd be brought before Lt. McKinney, the one person who might help us out of a jam.

The girls would need a place to stay. Jeep and I studied the "rooms for rent" classified ads in the base newspaper. We located one that appeared affordable and phoned, reserving a room for the two over the upcoming Labor Day weekend.

Friday evening, September 3, with the new base sticker prominently placed on the windshield of Jeep's Plymouth, he and I headed for the Joplin bus station. We parked the car on the street near the depot and went inside to ask if the bus from Kansas City was on time.

"Oh, yeah, guys," the ticket agent replied. "She'll be pullin' in any minute now."

We walked back outside and waited for their bus. The K. C. bus soon arrived. After watching a number of passengers step down from the bus, we spied Beverly and Bettylou. Jeep and I took off on a dead run toward them. The girls noticed us, stopped in their tracks, opened their arms and prepared to be smothered with hugs and kisses.

While waiting for luggage to be unloaded from the baggage compartment, the four of us discussed the latest developments since we had last exchanged letters. The girls claimed their suitcases. Jeep and I each grabbed one and led the way to the car.

We drove the girls around Joplin a while that evening, stopping at a drive-in restaurant for malts. Exhausted from their trip, the girls were anxious to check into their temporary quarters. We drove them to the address we'd seen in the newspaper ad. It turned out to be a rambling unfinished house on the northern fringe of town. Jeep and I carried the girls' bags up a set of recently installed wood stairs, explaining our predicament as we climbed.

"Ya hafta remember," Jeep warned, "we're scheduled for a weekend bivouac. We still hafta get outa that!"

"Well, what do we do?" Bettylou asked. "You're not leaving us stranded out here?"

"We'll answer roll call as if we're goin' with the rest of the company," Jeep explained. "We have a plan."

"I hope it works," said Bettylou.

We were interrupted by a chunky middle-aged red haired lady who pulled the suitcases from Jeep and me.

"See ya about the middle of the mornin'," I called.



The tired girls had turned to follow the brash woman who was anxious to herd them away from us.

As we drove back to the base, Jeep and I discussed the Bible Belt mentality and the people's fear of providing a place for the slightest suggestion of hanky-panky.

After chow the next morning, Saturday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, Jeep and I put our shaving kits and a change of clothes in the trunk of the '37 Plymouth. The other Company M GIs boarded trucks for the forest area nearly two miles northwest of our barracks. As Jeep drove, we completed our last minute planning. Reaching a deep rutted narrow dirt lane running east and west between an expansive rock-laden field on the south and a forest on the north where our company was to assemble, Jeep drove past the parked GI trucks and on a sufficient distance. He pulled the car off the lane and parked under a clump of huge oak trees.

With the car out of sight of any company noncoms, we walked back a good 500 yards and joined the other GIs in the wooded area. The sergeant in charge immediately called the roll. We answered. When roll call was complete, the sergeant positioned himself near a tree west of us. He instructed the company to run in an easterly direction upon hearing his whistle. When we heard the whistle again, we were to drop to the ground and cover ourselves with newly cut tree branches in small stacks scattered throughout the wooded area. The sequence would then be repeated. Whistle: Get up and run. Whistle: Drop to the ground and take cover. The sergeant obviously intended to remain at the back of the pack, making certain no one dropped out. Jeep and I had planned to remain at the back of the pack and drop out after hitting the ground the third time. Of course, we had expected the sergeant in charge to lead the company on maneuvers, not remain back there with us.

The sergeant blew his whistle immediately. The company of men ran as instructed. In a few seconds I heard the whistle again and dropped on the green grass, rolled to the nearest clump of branches, covered myself and awaited the signal to run again. I kept thinking about the anxious girls waiting to be rescued from their unfamiliar surroundings.

The shrill whistle sounded again. I threw the branches off and ran slowly, hoping the sergeant, with his whistle, would run on ahead. I looked for Jeep but couldn't sort him out from the other running GIs. The whistle blew from a distance ahead. I dropped near a pile of branches, pulled a few over me, peeked through them and waited.

The whistle blew. I threw the branches off, rose to my feet and ran slowly. The whistle sounded from some distance ahead. I dropped onto the pasture grass and covered myself again with tree branches. The distant whistle blew. I remained hidden just as we had planned. After a minute or more I heard the whistle. I peeked through the branches but couldn't see Jeep. I gingerly pushed the branches off of me, stood up and looked around.



Except for a few chirping birds all was quiet out there in the woods. The nearly inaudible whistle sounded again. It was far away.

I searched the stacks of tree branches scattered throughout the forest. Suddenly, I detected movement under a pile of branches about twenty yards south of me. I knew it could be one of the company noncoms. I froze. The distant whistle was nearly inaudible.

Crawling out from under the suspect clump of tree branches was Jeep. He got to his feet and saw me racing toward him. We ran out of the forest, then along the grassy area beside the narrow lane to the car.

As we approached the house on the northern outskirts of Joplin we saw Bettylou and Beverly sitting in lawn chairs beneath the trees, their suitcases beside them. They were displeased with their quarters. Their complaints included a hot and humid room with no means for cooling. Jeep and I loaded the girls' bags into the trunk of the car, explained to the haughty landlady our orders had suddenly changed, paid her for the night's stay and hurried to join the ladies in the car. Jeep slid in behind the wheel beside Bettylou. I joined Beverly in the back seat. He started the motor and we sped away. The girls continued to tell us about their experience.

"Camp followers!" Beverly said, laughing. "That's what she thought of us!"

"She might as well have come right out and said it," Bettylou concurred.

"We're in the Bible Belt," Jeep explained.

Rare for Beverly to voice an opinion against anyone, it was obvious the landlady's remarks had definitely disturbed both the girls.

"Jeep's been savin' his allotment of gas stamps," I said, changing the subject. "We can see the sights now."

We drove to the big hotel in downtown Joplin that we had picked out months before when Eddie, Jeep and I first walked around the town. The girls checked in and were given a key to a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor room. Jeep and I were assigned a room on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. After placing the suitcases, shaving kits and other items in our room, Jeep and I bounced down the stairs covered with thick maroon colored carpeting to the floor below and down the hall to the girls' room. The girls had changed into casual clothes that made them appear very cool.

Jeep and I wore the regulation summer khaki uniforms. Of course, we would be considered "out of uniform" by any MP if we weren't wearing neckties with sleeves down and cuffs buttoned.

The four of us took an elevator down to the lobby and walked out to the car, definitely noticing the increasing heat and humidity. Once in the car we removed our neckties, opened our collars, unbuttoned and rolled up our sleeves. We drove around seeking out the few sights of the area and ate at a drive-in restaurant.

After lunch, the neckties went back on and sleeves rolled down as the four of us walked around downtown Joplin. The girls purchased a few postcards and other souvenirs. Jeep and I chipped in for a fifth of bourbon.



He and I had previously discussed the state of our romances, deciding the time had come for each to "go all the way." With the opportunity at hand and so little time, the whiskey was to serve as a crutch in this noble endeavor.

After spending a long hot afternoon walking around town, joking, laughing, shopping and seeing sights, we drove back to the hotel to rest and freshen up before going out to supper. As we shopped that afternoon, we had seen a downtown restaurant we would return to for the evening's dining.

That evening Jeep and I called upon the girls at their room. They were dressed in very attractive suits with skirts, silk stockings, high heels and hats. Their hair appeared exquisite. It was with great pride we escorted the ladies out into the evening darkness. Jeep and Bettylou sat in the back seat. I opened the right front car door for Beverly and hurried around the car to the driver's side.

With Beverly in the front seat beside me, I drove Jeep's Plymouth in search of something resembling a nightclub north of the city. It was pitch dark when I drove up to a wood building with a small blue neon beer sign in a window.

Inside we located an inconspicuous booth where we each ordered a coke. The sale of mixed drinks was illegal. Establishments of this type served beer and soft drinks, primarily coke and 7-Up, called "set-ups," at high prices. The management pretended not to know customers were mixing their own drinks in the booths. Of course, anyone could figure, if they don't know, why the high prices for the small glasses of coke, etc.

Jeep sneaked the whiskey bottle out of the paper sack in its hiding place beneath his seat, unscrewed the cap and "spiked" the cokes. A juke box in a far corner played what we described as "hillbilly music." It was a cross between gospel and bluegrass, often mixed with a nasal vocal about a failed romance.

I walked to the nickelodeon in the corner and searched for our kind of music and finally played what appeared to be the closest to it, but found no recent big band records there. The girls, who loved to dance, urged us to get on our feet with them anyway. The four of us thoroughly enjoyed this special night. I was concerned the girls, dancing at times, then sitting, joking and laughing, were still not showing signs of being tipsy. We ordered another round of set-ups. I asked Jeep for the bottle and spiked the drinks heavily. The girls were unable to finish those drinks.

It was well after midnight when we left the place. Either the whiskey or the high heels made Beverly rock a bit on the way to the car. I steadied her. Jeep drove back to the hotel.

Going up in the hotel elevator Jeep reminded me in a whisper he and Bettylou were engaged and stated his intention to occupy the girls' room. Beverly and I went on up to the third floor room.





**Bettylou Comstock and Victor Eugene (Jeep) Wierson  
Joplin, Missouri, 1943**



Once in the room I, of course, expected to commence making mad passionate love. Oh, no! Beverly, unaccustomed to drinking liquor, became ill. She felt badly and was in the bathroom from time to time. Early the next morning she gargled in an effort to get her throat back to normal. Every time I have gargled since then I think of her throwing her head back and gargling on that bright Sunday morning. I blamed myself for over-spiking her coke and making her sick.

The next morning none of us felt like eating breakfast. We got in the Plymouth and drove south into Arkansas. By the time we arrived at a small town over the state line we were hungry. In the roadside restaurant where we stopped, Jeep and I used the men's room.

"Well, R. J.," he asked, "how did it go?"

"It didn't go," I admitted. "Beverly got sick."

"Didn't go for me, either," he said with a chuckle, "I fell asleep."

"No more games. When she's ready, I'm sure she'll let me know."

"Yeah," Jeep agreed. "No more games . . . no more liquor."

At the restaurant we asked the best places to see in one day. We visited a few interesting points then located a swimming pool in a park. The girls had brought their bathing suits. Jeep and I donned our trunks. I was struck seeing how Beverly filled out her swimsuit and impressed with her swimming ability. I tested my customary beneath-the-water endurance feat, remaining under for a full 60-second count.

Lying on the beach towel beside the pool, Beverly and I recalled the last time we were at a swimming pool.

"You were only there for that one day," I recalled. "You wore a bathing suit with yellow and black stripes."

"That's not all it had," she added with a chuckle. "Did you notice the split in the crotch?"

"Not really, but I know you were anxious to get back in the water," I said with a laugh.

I threw my arm over her steamy shoulders, pulled her close and kissed her.

"I kept thinking of you after that. I couldn't get you out of my mind. I thought how terrible if I would never see you again."

"We were little kids, R. J."

"Little kids have feelings."

"I know," she replied, reaching for my neck.

We pulled each other close and kissed, holding it a long time.

The hot afternoon ended. We found a tourist court and rented two cabins. Jeep and Bettylou "moved into" one. Beverly and I occupied the other knotty pine cabin with a large double bed and bamboo furniture.

She returned from the bathroom in a light colored slacks suit, looking for a place to hang her wet bathing suit. I went into the bathroom, removed my swimming trunks and put on my uniform, except for necktie. I returned and draped my wet trunks over the arm of a bamboo chair opposite her wet suit



and rolled up my shirtsleeves. She was lying on the bed, but not asleep. I laid down beside her. She rolled over on her stomach.

"I am Tondalayo," she said in a low sexy voice.

Beverly slithered across the bed in a distinct impersonation of Hedy Lamar in the film, "Tondalayo," that we had seen the year before. She continued moving toward me, then slithered away, murmuring lines that mimicked those of the movie sex goddess. I kissed her each time she slithered over to me.

"I am Tondalayo of the jungle," she said in a sexy hushed tone.

"Did I tell ya Hedy's lawyer is in our barracks?" I asked.

"Yes, you mentioned that in a letter."

"You make a better Tondalayo than she did," I said.

"Oh, really?" she replied sexily, slithering once more across the bed to hug me again.

"Tondalayo want to rest now," she whispered, dropping her head back on a pillow.

"I'll always love you," I whispered in her ear.

"I sure hope so," she whispered.

I leaned over her. We kissed. I dropped back to lie next to her.

"I still hear sleigh bells in the snow," she whispered.

We snuggled. The heat finally forced us to separate.

We fell asleep side-by-side and were awakened the next morning by Jeep's loud pounding on the cabin door. He opened it and entered. We checked out of our cabins and drove north toward Joplin where the girls were to catch a bus home, stopping to eat at a rustic roadside restaurant in Missouri. As the four of us walked from the car, we heard soft strains from the restaurant jukebox through the screen door. Inside, a large ceiling fan cooled the place. We stood at the nickelodeon selecting songs and coming up with nickels to play them. I spied a new one by singer Dick Haymes, titled, "You'll Never Know."

As the melody commenced, I took Beverly's hand and led her onto the floor between the two rows of booths. Jeep and Bettylou joined us in the tiny space. We danced as if we had all the time in the world, eventually sitting down to the meals we had ordered.

We ate as our music played. After we ate, I got up and walked over to the jukebox and repeated playing the new Dick Haymes tune. I was beginning to catch onto the words.

"You'll never know just how much I love you," I sang along.

I took Beverly's hand. We drifted across the floor once again. Pressing back thoughts of the future, I didn't want that moment to end. I would remember it forever.

Jeep drove from the roadside restaurant north to Joplin, where the girls were to catch a bus home.

"I may be moving to Kansas City," Beverly said as we were driving along.

"Really?" said Jeep.



"I applied for airline school there."

"Would you leave the ordnance plant?" Bettylou asked.

"Yes, Marilyn and I are ready to move on."

She snuggled up to me, then confided, "It's not the same place you knew, R. J. Not really. Too many of our old gang have left. There's so much hanky-panky going on there now. Married people stepping out."

"What would ya learn in Airlines school?" I asked. "I mean . . . what would ya be doin' when ya get out?"

"The airlines have lots of different jobs. Some of the other girls applied, too. Betty Price from Ames applied."



**Airline schoolmates of Beverly.  
On right (black hair) is Betty Price, Ames, Iowa.**



"Betty did? Maybe you two will be together down there."

"Maybe," she replied.

"I don't know where I'll be," I said. "I'm still trying to apply for cadets."

"Yeah," said Jeep. "R. J.'s stuck on that cadet idea."

"I hope we can find a way to see each other wherever you go," Beverly whispered.

"We'll find a way," I said in hushed tones. "But promise me . . . if I'm ever outa first place with you . . ."

"Oh," she interrupted in a whisper, "don't worry about that."

She placed her right index finger to my lips. When she removed it we kissed.

"I know we agreed to tell each other if our feelings ever changed," she said. "I don't like change."

Jeep and I had arranged for two of our buddies to answer roll call for us at the end of the weekend bivouac so we checked the girls' bags and waited with them until they could board the bus north.

It had come time to say goodbye again, the third time for the four of us in '43. We stood beside the bus embracing and kissing as people scurried around us.

"It's been a beautiful time, R. J.," Beverly said. "And, never worry about a thing. You'll always be in first place with me. I still hear sleigh bells in the snow."

"I do, too, Tondalayo. And, we'll find a way to get together . . . no matter what."

The girls hurried to their bus and accepted a brief arm lift from the driver standing at the foot of the bus steps.

"Write me," Beverly called back from the steel step as she waved.

The girls disappeared into the bus. Jeep and I hurried to the car, using the last of the gas stamps when buying enough fuel to get back to Crowder.

In radio school Jeep and I copied and sent Morse code at 30 words a minute, striving to be comfortable enough to take the test at that speed. Upon returning to the barracks after school one evening, I spied a pink slip on my bunk pillow. The first sergeant wished to see me in the orderly room. I responded.

"You have an appointment tomorrow morning at 0-eight hundred hours with the aviation cadet office."

"Oh, thanks," I said.

"Maybe we'll get you outa our hair now," said a corporal behind the desk.

"Here's the building number," the first sergeant said, handing me a white slip.

"I know where that is." I assured him. "Thank Lieutenant McKinney for me, please."

I was dismissed from school for the morning appointment. At the air cadet office I was given a test. When I walked away I was not at all sure how I had done. I joined Jeep in school.



"Do you think you passed the test?" he asked.

"I dunno. They'll let me know."

At mail call a corporal called out a number of names. When I heard "R. J. Clark," I stepped forward and took the only letter the corporal had for me. It was the first I had heard from Beverly since Jeep and I saw the girls off on the bus at Joplin on Labor Day. She had been accepted at airlines school. Both she and Marilyn had given their notices at the plant and would be moving to Kansas City soon. American Airlines was helping them locate a place to live.

Jeep and I continued building our code speed, taking and sending at 30 words a minute. Once again in the barracks after school, a pink slip appeared on my bunk. I headed for the orderly room.

"C'mon in, Corporal Clark," called Lt. McKinney from his desk as I stepped inside the orderly room door. I hurried around the left end of the counter, stopped just inside McKinney's office and saluted. He arose from his chair, returned my salute, placed his knuckles on his desk to brace himself as he leaned forward.

"I have good news, corporal. You passed the air cadet exam!"

I smiled broadly. He extended his hand. I reached for it. We shook hands briefly. I tried but couldn't speak.

"Get those barracks bags packed. You'll be shippin' out in a few days. The first sergeant'll let ya know when."

"Oh thanks, Lieutenant. I sure appreciate your help."

"I wanna thank you, too, for your help. You and Wierson both. Good luck, Clark!"

I saluted, turned on a heel and walked out.

That was the last time I saw Lt. McKinney. Jeep and I often spoke of him later.

In the barracks that evening, Jeep sat on the bunk next to mine as I commenced packing.

"Shippin' out, huh?" Jeep asked. "Just when we were about to pass 30 words, too. He thought a few seconds, then added, "I wonder where Eddie is by now."

"Oh, God," I came back, "I wonder." Changing the subject I said, "Listen, Jeep, if I passed that test, I know you can."

"Me? Cadets? I think I may have a future in radio. Thirty words a minute, ya know."

"Ya wouldn't hafta make a decision between the two unless ya passed the test."

"Well, that's right. And, if I flunk it, I'd still be okay in radio."

"Why doncha ask Lt. McKinney to set ya up an appointment?"

"Guess it wouldn't hurt anything."

The next morning Jeep asked McKinney to set the appointment. He took the aviation cadet exam and passed. I threw my barracks bags on the truck taking me to the railroad station. Jeep had walked over to see me leave.



"Well, R. J., guess this is g'bye," Jeep said. "McKinney'll let me know in the morning about my leave request and gas stamps. If they come through, I'll drive the Plymouth home and come right back to ship out myself."

"I'll write ya as soon as I get where I'm goin'," I promised.

"Yeah . . . keep in touch," he said, reaching for my hand. "It's been one helluva ride, huh?"

"Yeah . . . we took a few chances, but . . ."

Jeep laughed and interrupted. "God, I'll never get over you tappin' that MP on the shoulder at the K. C. train station."

"Oh, yeah," I said, laughing.

"Where d'we get the train to Omaha?" he said, imitating me through his laughter.

He grabbed me around the neck and threw a punch into my gut. "I'll miss ya, buddy."

When he released me we shook hands briefly. I climbed onto the waiting GI truck.

"Oh, when you're home ask Mrs. Gibb about Eddie!" I shouted from the back of the truck.

"Yeah, I will. S' long, R. J."

As the truck pulled away, Jeep called out, "Remember what George said, 'Don't take any wooden nickels and don't volunteer for a damned thing!'"

I laughed at his precise quote of my Dad and tossed Jeep a quick final salute. The truck turned the corner. He was out of sight.

In a couple days, I got off the train at Miami Beach where I joined a number of other GIs at the Hotel Charles on Collins Avenue. There were no beds, but mattresses scattered on the floor of the large room where I was assigned. I immediately wrote post cards to Beverly, my folks and Jeep. I thought there was a chance Jeep may also be shipped to Miami Beach. If so, he'd know where to find me.

We learned the country's flight schools were jammed. Our flight training would be delayed. We were classified "aviation students" and would be shipping out to a "College Training Detachment," or CTD.

"R. J.!" a voice called early one morning.

I awoke with a jerk, rolling off my mattress half asleep and grabbing my pants.

"Sergeant Persuiti says, 'drop yer cocks and grab yer socks! It's time for reveille!'"

Looking past the other GIs moaning and turning on their mattresses, I made out the silhouette of a familiar figure in the doorway.

"Jeep!" I called with a raspy voice.

I quickly dressed.

"When'd ya get here?"

"Last night. Where d' we go to chow?"

"I'll show ya. Just a minute. Gotta hit the latrine."

"I'll wait out here," he said, stepping out in the hallway.



We ate at the mess hall. He showed me where he was staying at the Drake Hotel, on Collins Avenue, a few hotels north of my hotel. We reported back to our individual hotels for roll call, agreeing to meet that evening at the bar in the basement of the White House, a nearby hotel also on Collins Avenue.



**Bert Schoen, Jeep Wierson and R. J. in boxing ring.  
Jeep and Bert lived at the Drake Hotel (background),  
Miami Beach, late summer, '43**



As the hot Florida sun was going down, I headed for the meeting place. "I want ya to meet a friend of mine," Jeep said. A GI on a bar stool next to Jeep turned to face me. "Bert!" I shouted, grasping the hand of Bert Schoen, an old Ames friend. "Got your dummy with ya, Bob?" Bert quipped. "Right here," I came back, placing my hand on Jeep's shoulder. "Yeah Bert," Jeep said, "We can tell ya a good one about buildin' a dummy!"

Bert was staying upstairs, as was Jeep, at the Drake Hotel. He was close to six feet tall, weighed about 175 pounds, with blue eyes and light colored curly hair. He had also played football at Ames High. We had a beer together at the bar in the White House Hotel basement bar and went out to see the sights. Bert had a camera and asked a passing GI to snap a couple pictures.

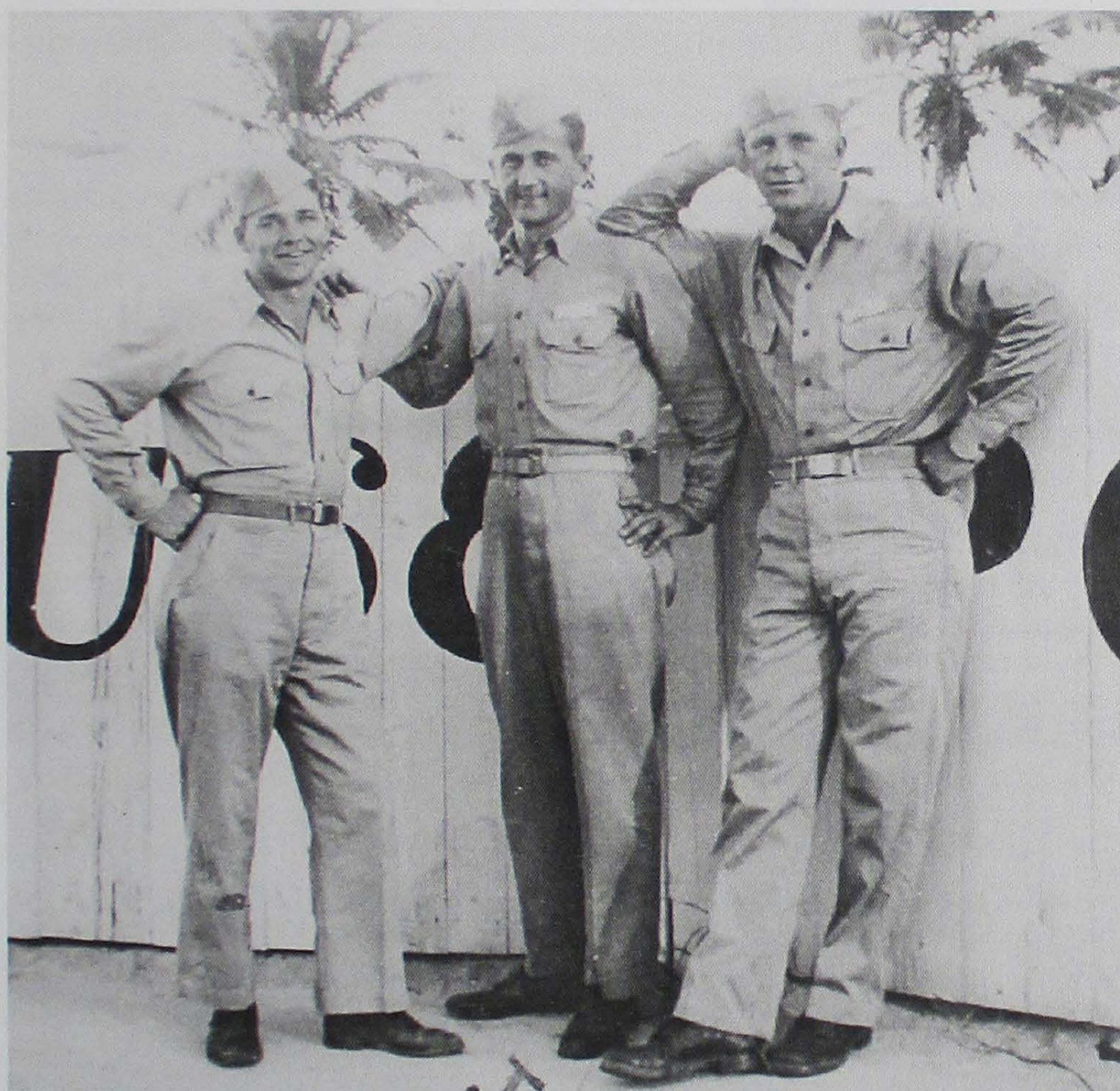


**Jeep, Bert and R. J. in front of the White House Hotel, Miami Beach. Bert's drunk act stemmed from Jeep and R. J. having to rescue him from the bar in the White House basement.**



Bert had been at Miami Beach a few days and seemed to know where to go. He especially wanted to show us the bar at the "off limits" famed Fontainebleau Hotel, a huge pink colored building on the beach close to the ocean. The beach area near the ocean was patrolled by MPs. We weren't sure we could cross the beach area without being detected. Trudging across the beach sand without being seen would be tricky, but having downed one round we'd gained sufficient fortitude. As usual we pressed our luck.

The Fontainebleau was a fancy upper class hotel, not occupied by the military as those where we stayed 500 yards away on Collins Avenue. There were a few older people at the north end of the bar when we entered. Although the bartender understood we were off limits, it was obvious he welcomed our business and probably even our lively company at the south end of the huge bar.



**R. J., Jeep and Bert at board fence hiding the beach  
(no cameras allowed on the beach)  
Miami Beach, Florida, summer '43.**





**Bert, R. J. (leaning against post – sitting on nothing) and Jeep.  
Beach and ocean are behind wood fence.**



Making certain we were back at our hotels before curfew, we parted, agreeing that if we hadn't shipped out by the next evening we would meet again at the White House bar.

Following roll call the next morning in the lobby of my hotel, a number of us were ordered onto GI trucks with no explanation of our destination. Our short truck convoy made its way north along Collins Avenue, veered west then north again. We traveled nearly half an hour. When the convoy stopped, we were ordered off the trucks.

We were beside the Indian River in northwest Miami Beach, moving into a resort of several two-story buildings named, "Barritz Villas." I was assigned an upper bunk on the second floor of a villa located across a narrow north-south street from Indian Creek. I couldn't meet Jeep and Bert as tentatively planned, but realized one or both of them may have been transferred just like me. Of course, we had no telephones.

A very likeable young blond staff sergeant, named Jernigan, explained we would only be at that location a few days. He knew no more than we did as to our next location. He led us in calisthenics and on long marches. Being back under air corps command, we sang as we marched. The marches included running in formation in the heat and humidity. We were otherwise restricted to the "barracks," resulting in considerable restlessness among the men in our crowded villa.

Word got around that a navy ensign and his new bride occupied a first floor room in a villa across the patio from ours. When the breeze died down in the evening, window drapes were drawn and blinds were raised to allow for fresh air. From our vantage point on the second floor, we could see down into the newlyweds' room and were entertained by their playful capers – until the drapes were rudely drawn.

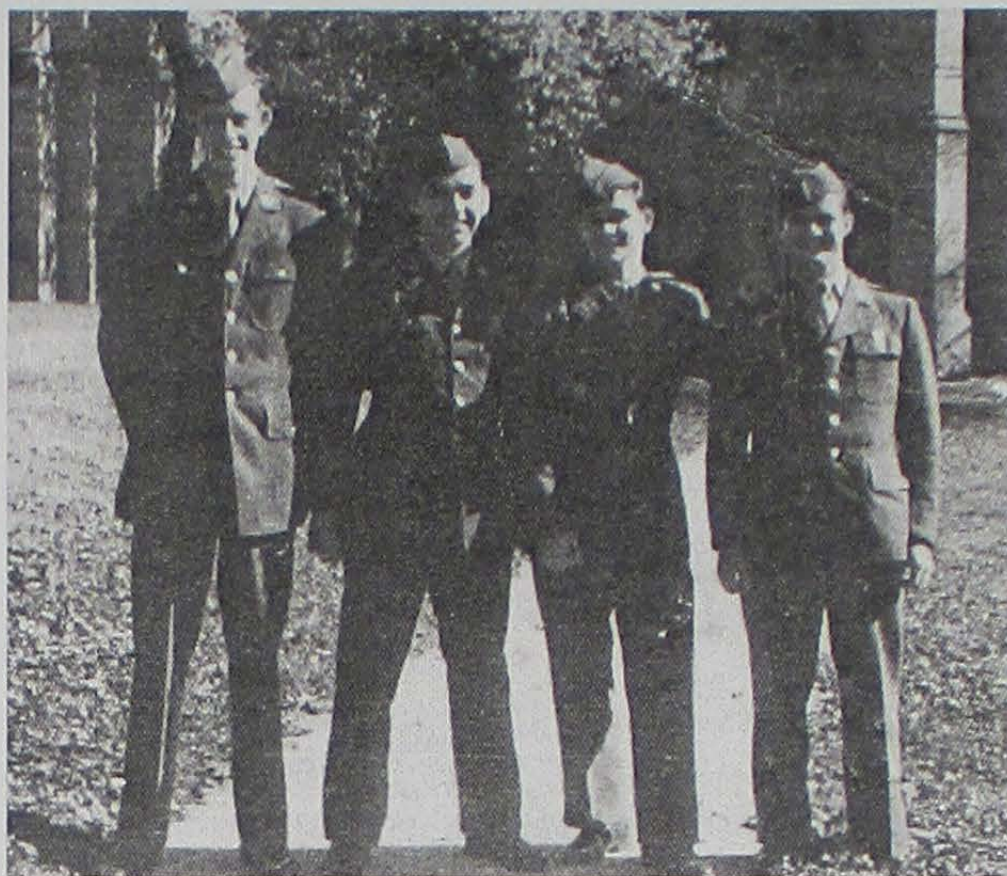
After several long hot days and nights at the Barritz Villas, we climbed onto GI trucks that delivered us to the railroad station, then boarded a troop train that chugged north. The long hot ride in soot and grime ended at Columbia, Missouri. During the few months I had been in the service, I had gone from Iowa to Florida, then to Missouri, back to Florida and now back to Missouri, but I had no complaints. Columbia, located about halfway between Kansas City and St. Louis, meant I would be only a little over a hundred miles from Beverly, who was in airlines school at K. C., and less than 300 miles from home.

We were to attend the University of Missouri and get in some flight training. I associated the U. of M. with All-American football player, Paul Christman, number 98. Back home on the farm in the late 30s, my brother, Paul, and I listened to many radio sportscasts giving football play-by-play portrayals of Chrisman's outstanding running and passing.

After getting off the train at the Columbia railroad station, the roll was called. We were assigned GI trucks. The leaves of the trees lining the streets had commenced turning fall colors. The blue sky was dotted with white clouds. The clean midwest air was crisp. We passed dormitories where young



ladies appeared at the windows. The trucks took us down a gentle slope, stopping at the Delta Upsilon fraternity house, vacant due to students having gone into the service.



**At Columbia, Missouri, roommates from room 14 at the DU house. Squadron D Airmen: Dave Blevins, North Carolina; Myron Briggs, Michigan; Bob Clark, Iowa and Bill Crew, N. Y.**

The DU house was to be the new home to those of us who had been at the Barritz Villa and others who had been temporarily stationed at other points around Miami Beach. A sergeant called the roll, assigning us to our rooms. I was assigned to room 14 on the north side of the second floor just east of the stairs. Also assigned to the room were Bill Crew, a stocky black haired hazel eyed fellow about my height and weight from New York; Myron Briggs, from Michigan, about my weight, but slightly taller, with black hair and blue eyes; and Dave Blevins, from Spruce Pine, North Carolina. Dave was over six feet tall, rangy and rather slim, with grayish-blue eyes and dark brown hair. Bill Crew had played hockey for The New York Rangers. We were in Flight 16 of Squadron D.

Columbia was home to two girls' schools, Christian and Stephens Colleges. Very few young men were enrolled at the U. of M. The girls welcomed our military occupation of the city. Just south of the DU house stood a sorority house and another just across the street east.

As we marched along the street singing, girls opened their dormitory and sorority house windows and waved at us. Word got back from guys who had met some of the girls that they really enjoyed our singing and had even experienced the shattering of sorority house and dormitory window pains from the resounding melodies that echoed against the buildings as we marched.



"You men have been selected to enter the army air corps aviation student program," called out Tech Sergeant George Pathoud, of Dallas, Texas as we assembled in the street east of the frat house. "You are the cream of the crop!"

I was thrilled to read Beverly's latest letter. She planned a weekend visit to Columbia. I had sent my address to Jeep's last address and heard back. He was in CTD at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Also on second floor of the DU house was Walter Abrak from Sioux City, Iowa. Walt was about 5' 8" and weighed about 150, with golden curly hair and blue eyes.

Abrak always bragged about his Iowa roots and included me, also being from Iowa, as one of "Iowa's cream of the crop." Walt was elected a student officer and often marched us to and from classes.

The superior attitude prevailed in the calisthenics and sporting events we experienced. Each day as I entered the field house, I walked past a special display cabinet featuring the retired football jersey of Paul Christman, the University of Missouri's famed number 98.

In sports, five of us shorter guys and tall Dave Blevins made up a team we named the "Bunny Rabbits," due to our appearance in gray sweat suits. We played touch football, basketball, volleyball, badminton and ran in various track races.

I brushed up on the basketball overhead shot I had perfected in high school intramural athletics, helping the "Bunny Rabbits" to become a challenging team in squadron competition. We were a real threat in football. I was back to carrying the ball a good share of the time, as in ordnance plant days.

One of the bunny rabbits came up with a football play he had learned at home. On first down, the ball carrier ran either left or right on an end sweep, with all the blocking that could be mustered. If the necessary yardage hadn't been achieved, on second down he ran the same play. Then, if the yardage still hadn't been achieved, he ran the same play on third down. If yardage was still needed we ran the same play on fourth down, but with one major difference. When the ball was snapped on fourth down, rather than punting the ball away, one of our better receivers dashed toward the goal line. The ball carrier, often myself, ran as if going around the same end as the three previous downs. Of course, the opposing players, now wise to the play, again raced to meet the ball carrier. But this time, upon reaching the line of scrimmage the ball carrier stopped, turned and tossed the ball across the field to one of our better passers who then slung the ball to the guy running toward the goal line. We scored often with that play.

Also on the second floor were several southern airmen. Blevins, one of my roommates, Comeaux, Crossett and Crume, all from the south, formed a quartet. The squadron enjoyed the serenades of the four men whose voices blended exceptionally well. They sang many gospel songs such as "The Old



Rugged Cross," "In the Garden," and "When the Roll Is Called up Yonder." They also taught us "The Great Titanic."

We were soon singing the religious songs in the ranks as we marched, mixing them in with many patriotic songs, such as "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "You're a Grand Old Flag," and "Over There."

Although we were supposed to face straight ahead as we marched, we occasionally sneaked peaks at the girls who had rushed to their dorm and sorority house windows when hearing our approaching singing squadron. The sound of our harmonics reverberated from the buildings as we marched to and from class. Singing Squadron D soon became a favorite of the young university ladies as well as with those at the two girls' schools.

Abrek, the Sioux City student officer, called Squadron D to attention, set us to marching and led off the singing, often with the songs we had learned from the southern boys' quartet. A favorite of our marching squadron was, "When the Roll Is Called up Yonder." With the southerners we didn't need a choir director.

Abrek, or another student officer, commenced with, "When the . . ." Then the entire marching squadron joined in with, "trumpets of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more . . . and the mornin' breaks eternal bright and f-a-i-r-r-r. And the saved on earth shall gather over on the other shore, when the roll is called up yonder I'll be there." The front half of the squadron then chimed in, "When the roll . . ." The rear section echoed, "When the roll." And altogether, "is called up yonder." And, again the front half of the squadron repeated, "When the roll" and the back section echoed, "When the roll," Then all, in synchronized step, continued, "is called up yonder." Some slipped in, "I'll be there." Once again, "When the roll," followed by "When the roll," with the entire squadron finishing, "is called up yonder. When the roll is called up yonder I'll be there." Another song was commenced immediately. Our singing was continuous.

I rushed to meet Beverly's bus at the station early one sunny Saturday fall afternoon. A gentle breeze sailed an occasional gold or red leaf from a tree.

The driver stood at the foot of the steps beneath the opened bus door, lending a hand to ladies stepping down, releasing one as she stepped onto the concrete driveway and extending his hand to steady the next. I soon spied Beverly in the line of passengers moving slowly toward the steps. Her bright blue eyes sparkled as they met mine. Her familiar heart-melting smile brought a broad smile to my face. The driver extended his hand, steadying her as she gracefully stepped down to the concrete driveway. She wore a beige colored coat, matching perky round hat and dark brown purse. A white silk scarf was visible at her coat collar. I experienced the same thrill that had vibrated through me when I first met her at the ordnance plant water fountain. As the driver released his hand from her wrist, Beverly and I hugged and kissed briefly then stepped away from the crowd. We stopped



and embraced, our lips sensuously locked. We separated for a second and took a breath.

"You look so nice, Beverly." I said. "I've missed you so."

"Oh, Bob."

She pulled me to her. We held each other tightly and kissed. We looked at each other, smiling warmly.

"How was the trip?" I asked.

"Lots of stops, but it was pleasant."

We turned and looked as best we could through the crowd. The driver opened the baggage compartment. After a number of passengers had picked up their luggage and walked away, Beverly spied her suitcase, pointing it out to me as the driver pulled it from the compartment. He placed her suitcase on the concrete driveway beside the bus then reached for another. I made my way through the waiting crowd, picked up her suitcase, returned with it to Beverly and took her arm.

"The room I rented is in a house only a few blocks from here," I said.

"It's a beautiful day to walk . . . if you don't mind carrying that suitcase."

"It's not very heavy."

Once more I felt so proud just to be walking beside Beverly Ann Barringer from Pleasantville, Iowa. Her grace simply radiated. The magnificent trees lining the street displayed their glorious fall colors against the deep blue sky with an occasional white cloud. The air was clear and crisp.

"Isn't it lovely?" Beverly said softly.

"Oh, Beverly, I really like it here. Just wish you could be with me. I mean . . . all the time."

"When you make captain."

"Well, I guess I'm on my way."

"I have all kinds of faith in you, Bob. You'll make it."

We climbed the concrete steps on the west side of the street leading to the front door of the house. The lady answered the door and showed us into the living room, crossing to a set of newly built wood steps on the far side of the room.

Beverly climbed the steps, opened the door and entered. I followed with the suitcase and closed the door. The small room had an adjoining bathroom.

We quickly caught each other up on the latest events of our lives while sitting on the edge of the bed. Still talking, we embraced and fell back on the bed. The talking ceased. I was again in heaven, her lips pressed against mine. I wanted to go all the way, but it wasn't to be, so I soon fell asleep.

We awoke. It was already evening. We took turns in the bathroom, preparing to go out to dinner. Beverly opened the door. I was right behind her. We stepped out and I closed the door. We stared down to a living room filled with faces staring back. We were embarrassed to be facing a row of staring strangers. I took Beverly's arm and led her down the stairs. We spoke to the glaring folks and made our way past each on our way to the front door. It seemed forever getting past them, but we were finally outside.



"Listen . . . if ya want," I said, as Beverly and I walked along the sidewalk, "once they're all cleared out, we can go back and check out. We can get you a room at the hotel."

"No." she said. "There's no money to waste. I'll stay there tonight. Next time, see if there's room at the inn."

I introduced Beverly to my New York roommate, Bill Crew, whose parents were at Columbia that weekend. Accompanying them was Bill's girl friend. She was a pretty blond with blue eyes who stood an inch or so taller than Beverly. From the outset, she and Beverly hit it off. She invited Beverly to visit her in New York. A few months later, Beverly made the trip.

Bill's dad had a good camera and was near professional at photography. He took pictures of the girls, the four of us who roomed together and a number of individual pictures.



**Bill Crew, his girl friend, Beverly and R. J. on campus,  
University of Missouri, Columbia, Fall 1943.**





**Bill's dad took these pictures of Beverly and R. J.  
at University of Missouri, Fall, 1943**



**Beverly and Bill Crew's girl friend  
Missouri University Campus, Fall, 1943.**

Before we realized it, our weekend had ended. Once again, we were at the bus station. Beverly and I stood beside her bus, waiting for the driver to check in her suitcase.

"We're always saying good-by," she said.

"There's a song lyric about that," I said.

"We're so lucky to be able to get together," she added. "Come to Kansas City when you can."

"I'll go to work on that!"



"Marilyn and I haven't had company. I hope you two hit it off."

I handed Beverly's suitcase to the bus driver who tagged it, handed her the stub and placed the suitcase in the bin beneath the seats of the bus.

We embraced and kissed. Passengers moved on past us to board the bus. She turned and climbed the bus steps, followed by the driver who entered the bus and swung the arm that closed the door. Beverly tapped on a window midway in the bus. She waved. I waved back. She took her seat on the opposite side of the bus. Her words echoed in my head, "We're always saying goodbye."

The latest development in our squadron involved Walt Abrak who was dating a girl at Columbia's telephone company. She could get free long distance phone calls through for Walt. There were no area codes or prefixes back in those days. He explained the procedure to me.

Walt would go to a pay phone, call his phone operator girl friend at the telephone company, give her the name or local phone number, city or town and state he wanted to call. She would put him on hold while attempting to get through to his parents or friends. Once she had either made contact or failed, she notified him. If she had managed to get the party he wanted to speak with, she would manually connect the parties. Of course, this was at no charge to him.

I continued working toward getting time off for a visit to Beverly and Marilyn in K. C. Early on Friday mornings, my classes included flying lessons in Piper Cubs at the Columbia municipal airport. I applied for a weekend pass and waited impatiently. To my great surprise it was approved. I wrote Beverly that I would be over to see her that weekend.

In the chilly crisp fall air early Friday morning, I flew with an instructor in a Piper Cub. After my flying instruction hour ended, I returned to the campus for my other classes. That night I boarded a bus, arriving in Kansas City early Saturday morning. I walked from the bus station to the YMCA where I checked into a room and asked which bus I should take to reach Swope Park.

The driver let me off at a bus stop nearest Beverly's address. I located the girls' Swope Park apartment. Marilyn and her friends had gone out. Beverly and I spent an enjoyable day together, mainly walking and talking in Swope Park. I told her about Abrak's connection at the phone company mentioning I may be able arrange a free long distance call to her if and when she and Marilyn found they could afford a telephone.

About midnight I stood at the bus stop awaiting a bus to take me back downtown to the "Y." I had waited a long time in the pitch dark when a passing car stopped for me. I got in to greet an attractive black haired young lady. As she drove toward Kansas City's downtown area, I glanced over at her. She was crying. I felt I should ask what the matter was, but rode on without saying anything. I figured she may have stopped for me simply because she had a brother or boyfriend in the service. Perhaps she had lost a serviceman in combat. She delivered me to the front door of the "Y." I got out and looked back inside the car before closing the door. She had stopped



crying. I thanked her for the lift and closed the door. I always wondered what had caused her sorrow and if I shouldn't have said something to comfort her.

The next morning I took the bus back to the girls' apartment. Beverly went into the kitchen and prepared breakfast. Marilyn and I spread various sections of the Sunday paper, the Kansas City Star, on the living room rug and were lying on our bellies reading the funnies. The girls didn't have much furniture since they only intended staying there until Beverly completed airlines school. This was my first real opportunity to get to know Marilyn. We had met at the girls' aunt's home in Knoxville, Iowa, only briefly the year before.

As I read the funnies, I made a feeble attempt at humor. For some time, Marilyn went on reading in silence, then suddenly burst into laughter over one of my spontaneous remarks. She and I talked, joked and read the funnies until Beverly called us into the kitchen to eat.

Beverly and I walked through the park that cloudy warm Sunday afternoon, playing horse. I was the horse, carrying her on my back, rolling in the crisp colorful leaves that covered Swope Park. I leaned over her to sneak a kiss. We were like two little kids in our own private heaven. I loved being with her any time or any place. We talked of the day I'd make captain and we would be married. Eventually, Beverly glanced at her watch.

"Whew . . . nearly four o'clock!" Beverly shouted with surprise.

We hurried back through the park and across the street to the apartment.

"Bye, Marilyn. I'm runnin' late."

"Good seeing you again," said Marilyn, grabbing my hand as I swung past her, carrying my shaving kit.

"Now, you take care of yourself," she added.

"You, too," I said, rapidly making my way to the front door Beverly was holding open.

Once outside, Beverly closed the door. We embraced.

"I'm so glad Marilyn likes you," Beverly said. "She doesn't like just everybody."

"Oh, we had a good time together. Short, but fun."

We wrapped our arms around each other.

"I want you to know I still hear sleigh bells," Beverly whispered.

"That bus'll be here any minute."

We hugged and kissed quickly. I hurried across the street just ahead of the bus pulling up. Once on the bus, I walked toward a seat on the left side and waved through the window at Beverly, still standing outside her front door.

The movement of the bus threw me into a seat. I made connections at the downtown bus station and was back in Columbia shortly after dark.

I knew Beverly would write to me that night. I also got out my stationary and wrote her a long letter, emphasizing our plans for her to visit me in Columbia before Christmas.



We were constantly reminded by the non-commissioned officers that we, being airmen, were "the cream of the crop," but not everyone appreciated our superiority. We had noticed resentment of our marching and singing on the part of soldiers in the Army Special Training Program (ASTP), also taking classes at the University of Missouri.

The ASTP GI's wore round shoulder patches featuring the torch of learning over what appeared to be a bedpan. We airmen referred to it as "the flaming bedpan" and called the ASTP boys "Bedpan Commandos."

Student officers Abrak and Bennett reported to Captain Goldstein that the ASTP men had been gathering at various points along our marching route from the DU house to the campus, jeering and generally making fun of our singing as we marched.

Captain Goldstein wasted no time. The next morning he ordered Abrak and Bennett to fall in with the rest of us for the march to school. The captain took personal command and led the singing as he marched alongside our squadron. There were no incidents.

At noon the captain met us on campus, assembled us into formation and marched us, singing, toward the school cafeteria. A clump of ASTP soldiers had gathered at the corner ahead of us. As our marching singing squadron got closer to the corner, the "flaming bedpan" GI's commenced snickering, jeering and mimicking.

"Squadron . . ." called Captain Goldstein, "Halt . . . one . . . two. Right face . . . fall out!"

As soon as we made the right face we reached for the ASTP boys who had been right in front of us until shocked by Captain Goldstein's surprise orders. Fists were flying. The battle turned into a chase – with most of the enemy escaping. Word got around. Squadron D's reputation was still intact.

George Crawford, another occupant of the DU house's second floor, constantly spoke of his home state, Texas, our next destination. "The wind blows and the sand flows." He would say. George had sandy hair, blue eyes, weighed about 175 and stood about 5', 10". He was a rangy Texan.

One Sunday morning, the story spread through the frat house that George had been attacked in a downtown tavern rest room by several ASTP boys, only to drive one of their heads through the bathroom wall, ending the conflict.

Those of us who roomed together – Blevins, the only tall one, Briggs, Crew and I made up the "Bunny Rabbits" football team. After distinguishing ourselves utilizing imaginative plays, we completed the season with honors.

Next, the Bunny Rabbits tangled on the basketball floor with guys much taller, except for our center, Dave Blevins. We each developed skills we had used in high school and utilized our quickness. I once again I found I could often score by dribbling across in front of the basket, whip the ball with my right hand up over my head and into the basket on my left, just as I had during our high school intramural games.



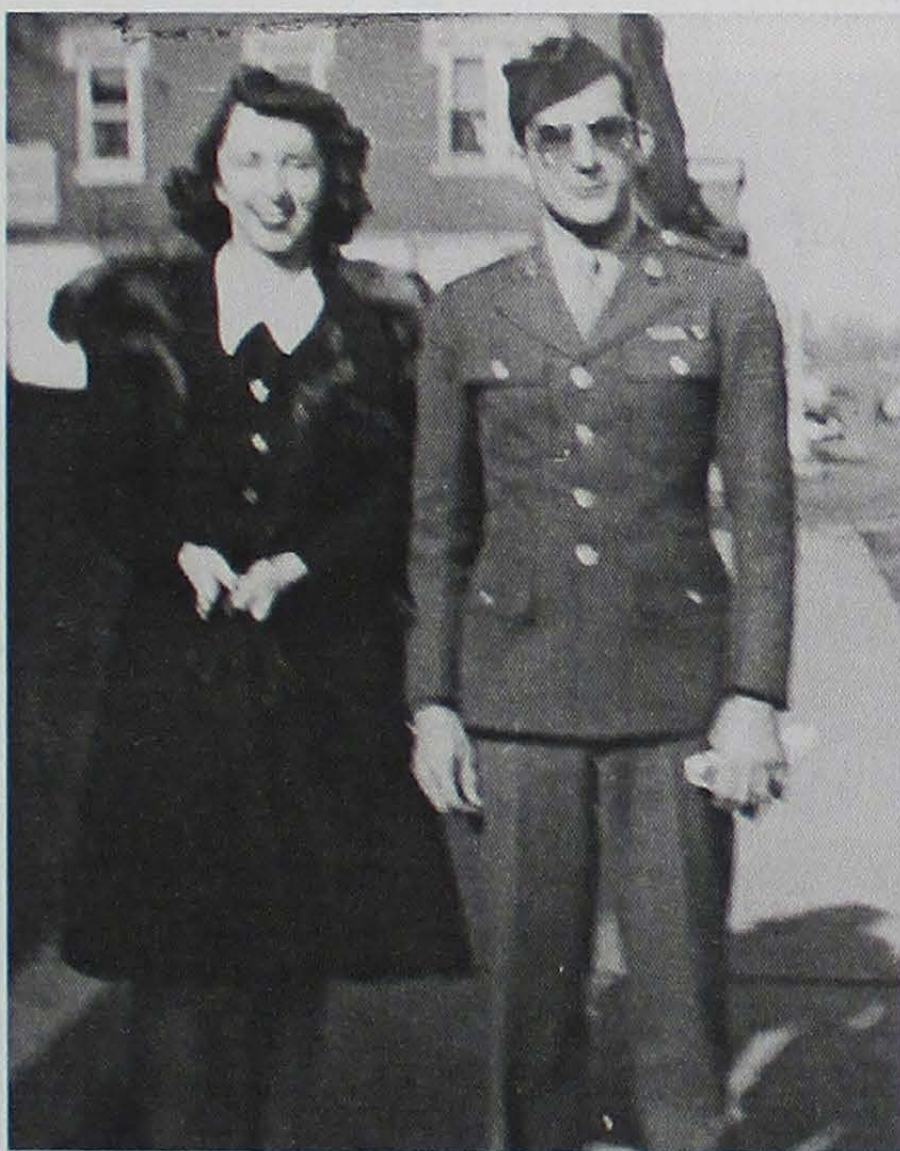
One afternoon while marching to class, Melvin Durkee, of Massachusetts, who also lived on our floor, was beside me toward the tail end of our squadron. He and I noticed two female students on the sidewalk so dropped back, allowing the squadron to march on without us. We joined the girls and walked to class.

In a few days, Durkee and I were notified we had been turned in by a student officer marching a squadron behind ours. We awaited a notice from the Wing Board of a hearing date. The Wing Board was made up of Army Air Corps officers based at Columbia.

I was surprised to see Captain Goldstein at the hearing. Of course, he was one of the officers making up the Wing Board. Both Durkee and I plead guilty to the charges. Captain Goldstein arose to speak on our behalf, explaining this was our first offense. Our punishment would be confinement to quarters New Years Eve - a night of festivities.

Each Friday morning, I was on the flight line at the municipal airport west of Columbia. Runways were snow-packed. We flew Piper Cubs under the directions of middle-aged male flight instructors.

Jim Comeaux, one of the squadron quartet, had a girl friend home in Louisiana. She was to visit him at Columbia the same weekend Beverly would be there, just before Christmas. We planned to go to a nightclub that was downstairs, below street level, in the downtown business district.



**Comeaux and his Louisiana girl friend double-dated with Beverly and R. J. the evening they became engaged at Columbia, Missouri, December 1943.**



It was dark down there. Music was provided by a jukebox. Beverly and I danced to a number of the day's popular tunes, then sat out a dance. I reached into my pocket for a small box, removed it and opened the lid. I removed the ring, put the box on the table top and reached for Beverly's left hand.

"Oh, Bob," she whispered. "What a . . . what a surprise!"

"And when I make Captain . . . you get the other one!"

She pulled me close. We kissed.

"What's goin' on here?" Comeaux asked, standing at the edge of the table.

"Look!" Beverly said through her tears, extending her left hand.

"Congratulations!" said Comeaux and his girl simultaneously.

"Thank you both," said Beverly.

"They wanna be alone," said Comeaux, leading his lady back to dance.

When they left I leaned into Beverly in the corner of the booth.

"I can't wait to tell Ginny," Beverly whispered, pressing her cheek to mine.

Beverly returned to Kansas City the next day, concluded last minute details and went home to Pleasantville. I would complete the week at Columbia, get in my flying lesson Friday morning, attend classes during the day, present the ventriloquist act at big old Jessie Hall Friday night and get on a bus for home after the performance.



**Billed as "Professor Clark" at the Squadron D Christmas show, R. J. and Larry, the dummy, entertain. 1943.**



I would meet Beverly in Pleasantville on Saturday.

Before noon Saturday, the Route 3 phone rang. Beverly was calling.

"We won't be able to get together after all," she said with excitement. "I have to be at the airport by noon."

"Oh!" I said, reflecting the shock.

Surprisingly, I had a good connection on that rural phone line.

"Aunt Fern and Uncle Lloyd are driving me to Des Moines in a few minutes," Beverly continued. "I have a priority on American Airlines."

"Where are they sending you?"

"Washington, D. C. I'll be working at National Airport."

"Boy, I'll sure miss you!"

"I'll miss you, too. I'll write just as soon as I have an address. Have a good Christmas. I still hear sleigh bells!"

"Me, too. Merry Christmas!"

"I'm sorry . . . I have to go, R.J."

"Seems we're always sayin' 'G'bye,'" I recalled.

"Sure does. I'll write. Bye-bye."

"G'bye, Beverly."

After I hung up, I wondered if I had allowed the awareness that my mother may be overhearing my comments prevent me from saying precious little words Beverly would expect.

"Beverly's flying to Washington, D. C.," I told Mom. "She'll be working at National Airport for American Airlines."

"Oh, what will she be doing?"

"She studied airlines weather in K. C. I'm sure she'll be involved in that."



**Squadron D New Year's Eve party at DU house, University of Missouri, 1943. First row from left: Harold Davidson, Dave Blevins, Israel Cohen (hand in air) and Jim Frestel. Second row: R. J. Clark, George Crawford and Melvin Durkee.**



Back at Columbia, we airmen were finishing up our semester and looking forward to the final flight test in Piper Cubs. Some of the guys had already taken their last flights. They had been tested by an instructor other than their regular flight instructor.

Beverly's first letter from Washington, D. C. arrived. She wrote that there was a pay telephone in the lobby of the rooming house where she was staying in northwest Washington. She included the phone number, recalling what I had told her some time before about Abrak's telephone operator girl friend offering to put a call through for me. Beverly said she'd stand by that phone Friday evening at eight o'clock her time. Seven in Missouri.

I gave the information to Abrak and looked forward to that phone call. A few minutes before 7:00 p.m., that Friday evening I waited by an outdoor coin phone. There was a big silver moon rising. I thought how Beverly could probably see that same moon. I put my nickel in the slot and dialed Abrak's girl friend's number at the telephone office. She did the rest. Soon I experienced that thrill I always got when I heard Beverly's voice.

This is the one conversation I have always thought I should have handled differently. Events afterward went wrong.

"Oh, Bob," she said through her tears, "I'm so lonesome! I want to come home. I want to come back so badly," she sobbed.

I should have promised to marry her if she would quit her job and come back, but I was about to leave Columbia. I couldn't see ahead clearly at all.

I never felt so helpless. We had only discussed getting married when I made captain. I was a long way from that point. We ended the conversation talking of the future. But, I felt I had failed her and should have suggested something – something where she and I would be together.

I went up in the Piper Cub with a strange instructor for the final test, thinking he would do just as my regular instructor had done – give me detailed instructions ahead of each maneuver he wanted me to perform. I took the plane up to 5,000 feet as he instructed, kept the nose on the horizon where he asked, leveled off and commenced maneuvers just as he instructed – chandelle, loop, dive, and finally, put it into a spin. Always before, my instructor told me when to put it into the spin and when to pull it out. So, I held it in the spin awaiting the order to pull out. We were spinning down and down. The ground was coming up fast.

"What the hell'r ya tryin' to do? Spin us right into the ground?"

I pulled it out and flew back to the airport.

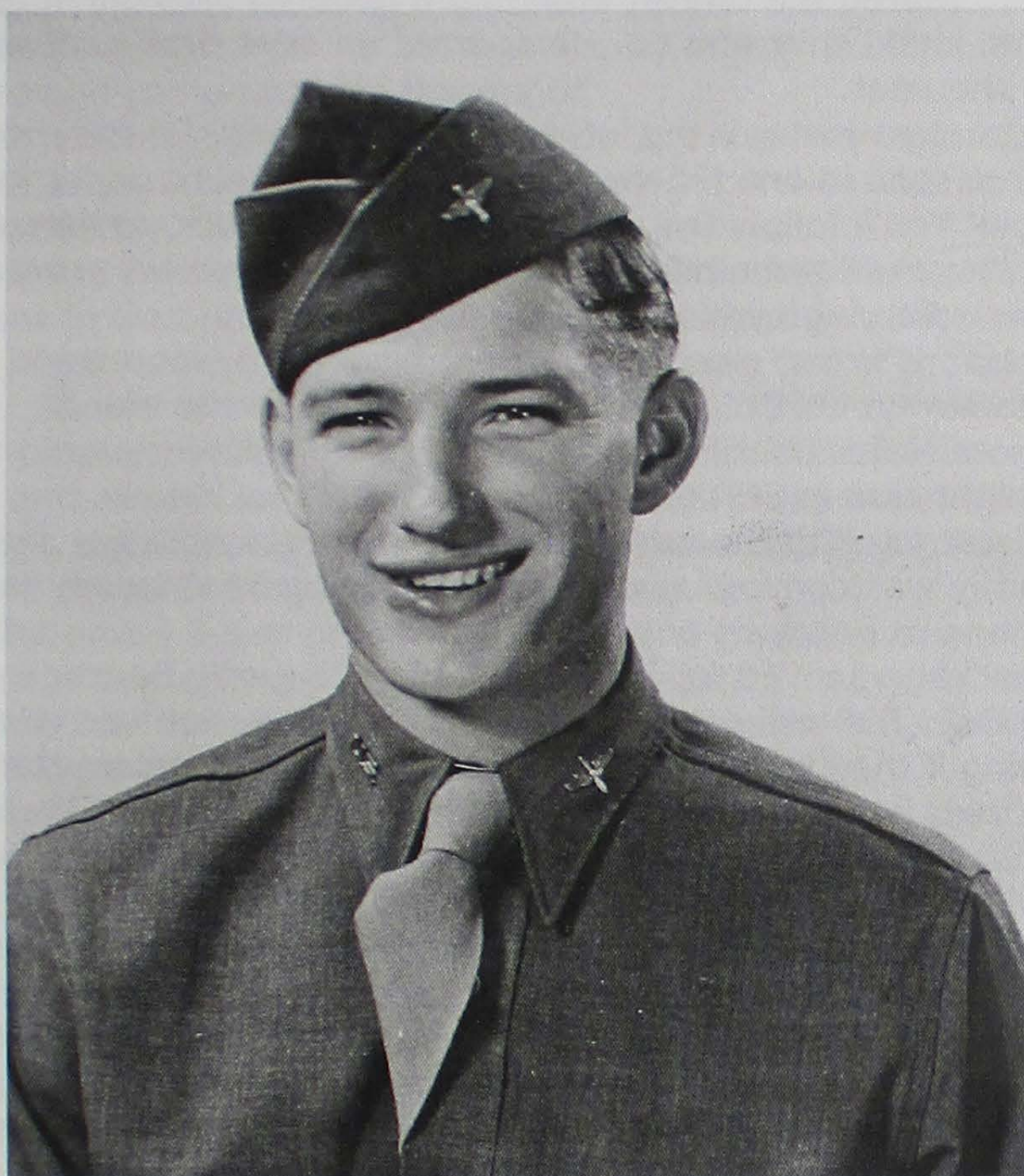
"Ya only do two-and-a-half turns after ya put it in the spin! Ya don't wait for an order to pull it out!"

The next week we left Columbia, singing as we marched to the railroad station. Girls were hanging out their windows waving goodbye, many in tears. We traveled by troop train to the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC) in Texas. Once there we were put through a series of physical, mental and vision exams. A number of us washed out. We learned 66,000



had been dropped from the cadet program that day. The reason given was that there were too few American flying officers dying in combat.

I hated writing Beverly and telling her I was no longer in line for making captain. I also wrote Jeep, who was still at the University of Nebraska, and would be heading for SAACC almost immediately. Then there was George Grider who was already in advanced flying school. Of course, I would inform my parents. The set-back would just have to be absorbed.



**George Grider**

A number of us were sent from San Antonio to radio school at Sioux Falls Air Base, S. D., about 250 miles northwest of Ames, Iowa. It was 20 degrees below zero when we arrived there, with frost crystals visible in the clear air. They glistened in the sunlight.

One of the first orders was to fall out for PT. We were housed in wooden barracks covered by black tarpaper. About a quarter mile north of our barracks was a wood stand similar to Sgt. Persuiti's stand at Clearwater. On it stood another chunkily-built middle-aged male Italian, Lt. Del Sasso, who led us in our calisthenics and gave us our PFR, physical fitness rating tests.



We were grouped alphabetically. Jim Basara, from Chicago, and Dave Blevins, of Spruce Pine, North Carolina, were in both my radio class and in PT with me. Jim and Dave had been at Columbia and were washed out at SAACC with the 66,000 who were dropped from the aviation cadet program.

Bouncing up on the PT stand as Del Sasso completed calisthenics was a rangy black haired middle-aged man with steely black eyes.

"I'm Major Boehmer . . . spelled 'B-o-e-h-m-e-r' and pronounced 'B-e-e-m-e-r,'" roared the officer, standing a good six feet tall in his pink officers' pants, khaki shirt and tie. He sported an olive drab coat with a gold leaf on each shoulder.

"I understand ya just got the let-down of your lives. So they washed out sixty some thousand in one fell swoop. Get over it! You're under my command now! You'll follow the regulations here. Ya fuck up here and, by God, I'll *crucify* ya! All remained silent. The major folded his arms across his chest, his black piercing eyes looking through us.

He unfolded his arms, climbed down from the high wood stand and walked briskly away. Lt. Del Sasso moved forward on the stand.

"Never cross Major Boehmer," said Del Sasso. "He's a rough one! Operated a night club in St. Louis before the war."

We were restricted to the base during our first six weeks at Sioux Falls. My 21<sup>st</sup> birthday was coming up and I plotted going into town – pass or no pass.

A small package arrived for "R.J. Clark" from Beverly Barringer of Washington, D.C. The letter with it explained how she had secretly written my folks asking if they intended to get me a watch – a custom that parents often carried out, getting their sons watches for their 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays. If not, she had explained to them, she would appreciate the privilege. They gave her the go-ahead. Beverly had sent my very first wrist watch.

On the evening of February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944, I walked south of the last line of barracks, crossed the field to the south base fence, remaining clear of the M. P's at the main gate. I hurried to the nearest bus stop, boarded the first bus that stopped, rode to town and got off in downtown Sioux Falls.

I walked into a saloon, sat alone in a large booth and ordered a cold bottle of Schlitz beer. I showed off my new watch to the waitresses. I had attracted the attention of a young lady who insisted upon buying me another Schlitz. I returned the favor. When I became so unsteady I could barely walk she saw to it I got on a base-bound bus. I remembered I had no pass, so could not go back through the gate. I got off a block ahead of the base gate. The crisp frigid snow crunched beneath my feet as I walked west and crawled through the fence and back to my barracks.

The next day while I was in radio class a note ordering me to see Major Boehmer appeared on my bunk.

I reported, stood at attention and saluted. The major returned my salute.

"Corporal Clark, I'm lining up entertainment. I see by your records that you do a ventriloquist act."



"Oh . . . yes, sir. But, my dummy's not here."

"Where's your dummy?"

"Home. In Iowa."

"Iowa's not far. Can you get it up here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You do that . . . and, let me know the minute it arrives."

"Yes, sir."

I saluted and turned to leave the orderly room.

"And, Clark . . ."

I stopped and turned to face the major.

"You get those corporal stripes sewed on . . . if ya wanna keep 'em!"

"Yes, sir," I responded mechanically, tossing him a salute. He casually returned the salute.

The big Sioux Falls Air Base swing band had become famous in the area. The musicians in that fine organization had developed renditions of popular recordings. "Elks Parade," by Bobby Sherwood, was one of the orchestra's best known. Each of our shows featured that rousing instrumental.

It was a pleasure entertaining GIs with so much material from everyday military life and always an appreciative audience. Every act in the show was of high calibre, each appearing for a few minutes only. Major Boehmer's shows always presented first class entertainment.

Due to the time I spent preparing scripts and traveling to and from engagements, I was exempt from routine activities. Finally, Lt. Del Sasso stopped by the barracks one hot afternoon carrying his PFR clipboard.

"I don't have a recent PFR for you, Corporal Clark."

I was aware that he, among others, resented the special treatment I was receiving from Major Boehmer. I knew Del Sasso hadn't shown up in the heat of the day by accident. He figured he would catch me out of condition and bear down on me physically in the heat.

"I have to take my PFR, too," he said. "It's just the two of us competing against each other."

I slipped on a pair of gym shorts and followed him to the PT field. He read from his clipboard designating the various feats to be completed and sat his clipboard down. We went at it. I beat him in the various races, number of pull-ups, push-ups and sit-ups. In fact, I had outdone him in every phase of the physical fitness rating test. He gave me a high rating and never mentioned PFR again. I kept entertaining with Major Boehmer's shows.

On Sundays, there were no radio classes, so some of the old "Cream of the Crop" Squadron D gang would get together. Blevins was the only member of the quartet with us. He taught us to sing "The Great Titanic" hill-billy style. When one of the guys showed up with a camera, Dave spoofed by having me sit on his knee as if I was his ventriloquist dummy. Others, including Jim Basara, paraded in front the camera performing one antic or another.





**Dave Blevins acts as a ventriloquist with R. J. as his dummy at Sioux Falls Air Base in 1944.**





**R. J. and Jim Basara at Sioux Falls Air Base, South Dakota, '44.**



Major Boehmer booked our show at the South Dakota State Prison, one Sunday, just after prisoners had eaten their noon meal. The minute I arrived at the prison, I commenced questioning the prisoners about a few of their secrets. I memorized them. Then, it was a genuine surprise when the dummy came out with facts that only the prisoners should have known. The band ended the show with its popular rousing rendition of "Elks Parade."

Mail call was always welcomed. Beverly's letters mentioned coming to Sioux Falls on her vacation. Jeep was in primary training. George was about to get his wings. Edythe had left the ordnance plant to commence nurse's training at Broadlawns Hospital in Des Moines. Sally had gone to work for JC Penney in a position involving travel. I received a letter and picture from Russell Kauffman, who was in the army, stationed in India.

My mother informed me Eddie Gibb had been killed in action. I recalled Jeep, Eddie and I boarding busses at the Hotel Sheldon Munn that cold dark January morning we left for the service. I could hear Eddie's mom, in that thick Scottish accent, asking Jeep and me to promise we would look out for wee Eddie. Our warning to Eddie just a year earlier - that he could end up as "cannon fodder," if he insisted upon washing out of radio school in order to get home - came echoing back. Carlene and her little boy would now be alone.

I wrote and asked Dad if he would mind sending Beverly the spare small radio he wasn't using. In no time she informed me it had reached her. Radio was involved in so many facets of our lives. We were entertained by big band music, dramatic stories, soap operas, comedy shows and depended upon radio for the latest war news, not to mention weather reports. On June 6<sup>th</sup> that year, radio reports kept us up to date on the invasion of Hitler's Europe.

We would soon be over there. Upon completion of radio school at Sioux Falls we were to go to gunnery school at Yuma, Arizona. Then we would get a furlough before being assigned to bomber crews.

GIs kept pouring onto the base. It became necessary to hold classes in two shifts. I was assigned to the night shift, commencing classes at 4:00 p.m. daily. Air Corps radio training was different from that we had taken in the Signal Corps at Camp Crowder. We were training to become radio operator-gunners on bombers. At Sioux Falls, we each learned to construct a radio transmitter and receiver that operated. Rather than concentrate upon sending and receiving high speed Morse code, as we had at Camp Crowder, we were only required to pass 15 words per minute for aircraft radio. We learned the latest in British radio technical developments.

Sioux Falls was a bustling town. Hotel rooms were in demand. I managed to reserve a room for Beverly that August at the main downtown hotel. Since I would be going to class at 4:00 p.m. the day she came in, I arranged for Jim Basara and Dave Blevins to entertain her and to introduce her to Joe Collins, a short, black kinky haired Irishman from New York with blue eyes. Joe was a few years older than me. He had the most time to devote to



entertaining "our out-of-town guest" and had an interesting past, having served with Mac Arthur's forces in the Pacific.

Beverly arrived on a hot humid afternoon. I met her train and took her straight to the hotel, where she bathed immediately to rid herself of the coal soot and perspiration. I had noticed a female hotel detective sitting at a small desk on the second floor. While Beverly bathed, I walked down the hall and spoke to her.

"Would you prefer that we leave our room door open?"

"Oh, I don't think that will be necessary. You look like trustworthy kids to me. In fact, you make a very cute couple!"

"Oh, thanks!" I said, walking away. "I'll tell her you said so."

I hadn't seen Beverly since we were at Columbia. We had just become engaged. We had been apart nearly three-fourths of a year, the longest period since we met at the ordnance plant two years before. We had spoken to each other by phone twice only. Our contact had been mainly by mail.

Beverly came out of the bathroom tying the belt of her housecoat and fluffing her long golden hair to dry it as she walked toward the bed. I closed the door and told Beverly what the lady house detective had said. She sat on the edge of the bed and smiled. I melted, as usual.

Her clean fragrance attracted me. I had missed holding her close and kissing her. War deprives people of being with those they love. Not being able to see, hear nor touch the person you love is a form of torture. I drank in the moment. We embraced and kissed, rolling on the bed as in the old days.

In no time there was a knock at the door. Jim Basara and Dave Blevins were there to show Beverly around Sioux Falls while I was in class. The next day was Joe's turn.

The next morning I took a bus from the base and arrived downtown in time to take Beverly to breakfast. She was excited telling me of the sights she had seen with the guys. They obviously enjoyed being with her. She had gone to bed early and caught up on the sleep she had missed while on the train. She told me she especially liked Joe Collins, admiring his maturity. I went on to tell her a couple of Joe's stories about his south Pacific experiences.

Back in the hotel room we were lying on the bed. The conversation had gotten around to planning for after the war.

"Oh, I thought I might go to college," I said casually, not having had time to really consider the question. "They're supposed to have some kind of veterans program."

"Well, what about your radio operator work?" she asked.

"What?" I asked. "Well, I don't know."

"Will you marry me?"

I burst out with laughter due to utter nervousness. She raised herself and got off the bed.

"Well, that's the last time you'll ever laugh at me."



She went into the bathroom and closed the door. I hadn't meant to laugh. Her question surprised me.

I had been preparing for going into combat and we hadn't mentioned marriage in any of our letters, not since 66,000 of us had washed out of cadets. I could see I had offended her. There was a knock at the door. Little Joe was there to escort Beverly around Sioux Falls. I had to leave for school.

I met her the next morning to take her to the railroad station. She had scheduled her vacation time to be able to spend a few days at Pleasantville with her aunt and uncle plus endless friends and relatives. Then, she would go back to Washington. Again we were saying goodbye.

Bill Winzell, of Chicago, right waist gunner from "The Memphis Belle," famous WWII B-17, paid a visit to our radio class. The Memphis Belle crew was the first to fly 25 combat missions. Achieving that level meant they could come home on leave. Bill appeared in place of the radio operator who had been severely shot up on their last mission. He was about my height and weight with prominent ears. He stood just inside the door at the back of the room. Our civilian instructors introduced him and asked us to turn toward the back of the room to listen to him. Since I always sat in the back row, he was directly in front of me. He and the other members of the Memphis Belle crew were making the rounds of air force bases to alert those of us about to head overseas what to expect in combat.

I had continued to correspond with Lenora Wright who had been in country school with me when we were kids. She had married. Her husband was stationed at Yuma Air Base, where we were headed. Just before we left for Yuma, I got a letter from her saying she was leaving for another location.

A week later we arrived at Yuma. It was very hot. We were told two jokes when we arrived. One was of a GI at Yuma Air Base who died and went to hell. Two days later he came back up for blankets. The other was a warning not to kick the sand because hell was only two inches below.

Each time we arrived at a new base there was a mail delay, then a lot of mail would catch up all at once. I waited over a week before receiving any mail. A letter from Beverly informed me she had arrived back in D.C. The weather had been hot all during her vacation. Marilyn, who had joined Beverly in D.C. earlier, was working for the FBI.

I kept thinking of her proposal and was going to make things right for my sudden burst of laughter. We still had the war to contend with, but marriage to Beverly would be heaven. I commenced making plans.

We lived in tents with dirt floors, woven wire sides and large canvass tops. We also had huge canvas flaps extending out to provide shade from the scorching sun. We would endure the desert heat for six weeks in gunnery school.

We learned to take a .50 calibre machine gun apart and put it back together blindfolded. In the air we flew in war weary B-17's firing window mounted .50 calibre machine guns at windsocks pulled by AT-6s.



One of the AT-6 pilots was a famous movie star who was married to a more famous movie star. Captain Gene Raymond, whose wife was the glamorous Jeannette Mac Donald, ate at the enlisted men's mess hall since the air base had no officers' mess. We would always see Gene sitting at a table alone. We were told he flew to California each weekend to be with his famous wife.

We looked forward to the leave time coming up at the end of our gunnery training. Someone came up with the idea of everyone in our squadron contributing a dollar on payday to go to the man who would spend the least time at home when on leave. After all, we had nowhere to spend our money in that desert.

We had another celebrity on the base. Famous golfer, Don Budge, managed the base theater. We had seen him there at times.

A picture post card arrived from Beverly. It was postmarked "Virginia Beach, Virginia." I showed it to some of the guys in the tent. One of the older men said he could see the shadow of a sailor in the picture. We all laughed, but I hadn't received much mail from her and I kept mulling over his meaning.

I had decided to take Beverly up on her Sioux Falls marriage proposal by surprising her. I would buy the wedding ring in Washington. I got the commanding officer to put me in for a priority on a plane. All the guys in the squadron were behind my plan.

A cheer went up in our tent when I got word from the orderly room that the airlines priority had been approved for a flight to Washington, D. C. It meant taking a train to Phoenix and boarding one of the new Constellations there and landing at National Airport where Beverly worked. How surprised and happy she would be. The planning thrilled me.

We only had days until we commenced heading in different directions across the country on leave. The only married guy in the tent came to me one evening and handed me an envelope.

"What's this?" I asked.

"It's yours," he replied. "We discussed it. You'll be home the shortest time."

"Oh, no! What about the guys who live so far away?"

"It's yours. You and Beverly enjoy it."

"Oh my God! Thanks, guys! Thanks so much!"

I received a letter from Dad. He had made a trip to Fort Worth, Texas to visit Bruce, who was back from combat in the south Pacific and in a military mental hospital. He urged me to go to Fort Worth on my upcoming leave and lift Bruce's spirits. My buddies in the tent were experiencing my quandary right along with me.

I immediately wrote to Beverly, not giving away the surprise I had in the works, although I hadn't heard from her in days. Days soon became a week and then, nearly two weeks and still no word. That wasn't like Beverly.



One hot evening we all came in from flying. It was time for mail call. After several names were called I heard, "R. J. Clark," and just knew it was at long last a letter from Beverly. I was right, so I held it up for all to see. A cheer went up. I went back to my bunk, flopped on my belly, and commenced to read.

"Oh, my God!" I muttered. "It's a 'Dear John'."

"I have decided to marry someone else and will be sending your ring back," I read aloud for all to hear.

I placed Beverly's letter in my musette bag, removed the envelope containing the money and handed it back to the guy who had given it to me.

I just had to get out of there. We hardly ever went anywhere alone. Numbly, I walked toward the doorway, ignoring the fact all eyes were on me.

"Anybody wanna take a walk?" I asked automatically.

"I'll go with ya," said one of the guys without hesitation.

I sensed the others were staring at him. I hesitated mechanically at the tent doorway.

"Oh, I can't go," said the GI who had volunteered to walk with me. "I have laundry to do."

I stepped down the single step into the hot sand, trudged through the sand and onto a sidewalk that led up the long grade to the theater. I walked aimlessly, looking up at the near full silver moon shining brightly in the light blue evening sky.

The base sound system played familiar music, "I'll Be Seeing You." Tears streamed down my cheeks. I knew why none of the guys would walk with me. They realized I needed to be alone. I let go as I walked.

I glanced at the moon as these words of the song lyric sailed through the sound system, "I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you."

"I'll always love you, Beverly." I managed as I gazed at the moon through my tears, the same moon she may be seeing at the very same moment.

"I still hear sleigh bells."



## CHAPTER 6

I cancelled my airlines priority. In a few days the engagement ring came back. We wound up gunnery training and prepared to go on leave. I would be spending the first part of my first real furlough with my brother in Fort Worth.

The envelope containing the money we had pooled was lying on my bunk.

"Whose is this?" I asked, waving the envelope into the air

"You keep that," said the squadron leader. "You'll be home the shortest time"

"Are you sure? What about the east coast guys?"

"It was decided unanimously," he replied. "Keep it. It's yours."

It was nearly dark when the Fort Worth train pulled into the railroad station at Yuma. I checked my barracks bags with the railroad baggage handler, carried my musette bag and overcoat, handed the conductor my ticket, boarded the train and spied a vacant seat. I slung the musette bag by its straps onto the overhead rack, folded the overcoat and placed it on the rack beside the bag. As the train was pulling out, I felt someone staring at me. I glanced along the seats across the isle and saw two pretty blue eyes fixed on me. The young brunette lady had a small daughter with her.

It became quite chilly crossing the desert during the night. I noticed the young lady trying to share a skimpy blanket with her little girl who had gone to sleep on the seat across from her. I got up, leaned across the drunken soldier who sat beside me, pulled my overcoat down from the rack and took it to the young lady.

"Here," I said, placing the overcoat on the seat beside her. "This should help."

"Oh, no," she said. "You'll need that."

I started back to my seat. She noticed that the drunken soldier had dropped over to occupy my side of the seat.

"You can sit here," said the young lady in a quiet southern drawl, folding the blanket to cover her daughter.

"Does look as if I lost my seat," I said, turning to take a seat beside her.

"We can share your coat," she said, spreading part of the coat over me.

When I checked in to the hotel at Fort Worth the following evening, it was for a family of three. The next morning I asked directions to the military hospital, made the correct bus connections and found myself waiting for my brother to be brought out to a visiting area.

"Bobby!" Bruce said when he saw me.



"Hi, Bruce. How're they treatin' ya?" I asked.

Bruce appeared very thin and pale – not the rugged Marine we had seen in the newspaper picture with the Jap bicycle on his shoulder.

"Oh, boy! Those electric shock treatments are really somethin'! They'll drive ya nuts if ya aren't already."

He explained that his treatment schedule would fully occupy him except for time he needed to sleep between treatments, suggesting I take advantage of my leave time by going home. The young lady and her daughter went home to Louisiana. I went home to Iowa.



**Vern ("Fooz") Norlin and Bill Valline in Bill's convertible in Ames, Iowa 1944**

Bill Valline met me at the railroad station in Ames. He drove a newer convertible. With him were two young ladies from Luther, a tiny town across the line in Boone County. Bill drove out southwest of Ames and followed a country lane into the timber. He and one of the girls went out on a blanket. I remained in the car, necking with the other girl. Soon she was looking for her glasses. They had been crushed on the seat beneath her rump during the action.

I missed Beverly. Since she returned the engagement ring I had gone much further with strangers than I had ever gone with her.

Bill drove us to a horse stable south of Ames the next morning. In the corral stood a dark colored western mare.



"She's not broke," Bill said. "Nobody's ever been on her back. Wanna try her?"

"What for?"

"I'll betcha 10 bucks ya can't stay on her back a full minute!"

"Well, let's see."

I crawled through the wood rail fence and walked up to the horse, pet her nose briefly and stepped off to her left. She stomped around. I grabbed a handful of her main and hurled myself upon her back. She hunched. I nearly went on over the other side but managed to right myself.

"Let me set the watch," Bill said, taking out a large round pocket watch. "Okay." She snorted and commenced to buck. I held tight to her main with my right hand, extending my left arm for balance. I relaxed and rocked with her bucking motion. She was circling to the left trying to throw me. I stayed with her.

"One minute." Bill called.

I threw my left leg over her neck and slid down her right side. The horse went bucking away. Bill pulled out his billfold, opened it and removed a 10 dollar bill.

"By God, ya did it." Bill said, laughing as he handed me the 10. "I didn't think ya could."

My leave time flew by. I was to report to Lincoln Air Base at Lincoln, Nebraska where I, along with hundreds of other airmen, would receive transfer orders. I wanted to drive a car to Lincoln, and from there to wherever I would be assigned. I dropped in at Mathison Motors in Ames, where I spied a 1931 Model A Ford for sale at \$165. No new cars were being distributed to car dealers during wartime. Used cars were at a premium, so I knew I could sell one before going overseas. I would ask Mom about a loan.

Her sage advice was that I approach Bruce for the money, since he had received a lump sum upon discharge from the Marines and had a job doing carpenter work. When I spoke with Bruce, I emphasized the rush for fear the car would be snapped up. He loaned me \$165. I needed additional cash for traveling, but he drew the line at buying me a car. Once I had the car in my name, I obtained gasoline rationing stamps and headed for Lincoln. I thought of selling the engagement ring, but the very idea turned my stomach.

I traveled to Lincoln Air Base, immediately running into old friends from radio school at Sioux Falls. A married couple was short traveling money, so I lent them \$5, realizing it meant that I would have to sell the ring so I would have traveling money. I joined the other airmen waiting for orders to be posted on the bulletin board. Noncoms came out of their offices, posted assignment sheets on the board and returned for more orders. My name finally appeared on one of the sheets. I had been assigned to Havener's B-17 crew at Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas.

I drove to downtown Lincoln. On "O" Street I located a jewelry store, parked the car and went inside. A young man waited on me. I took the little ring box out of my pocket and opened the lid.



"I'm afraid I'm going to hafta part with this. What can ya give me for it?"

He took the little box and walked a ways down behind the counter, hesitated there, then returned, closed the lid, handing the box back to me.

"We could only give you 10 dollars for it."

"That all?" I said, revealing my shock. "I paid forty for it just a few months ago."

"I know. There's quite a mark-up in jewelry."

"Well, I said, handing the ring box back to him. "I need the money."

He took the little box, walked back down the counter and came back with a ten dollar bill. I accepted the ten, placed it in my billfold and left the store. I had let the ring slip away that Beverly had worn on her finger. I was sad.

I hurried to a coin phone and called home collect. I got through, explained my situation to Mom, asking that someone there wire me \$15. She would do what she could. I told her I would check at the Denver Western Union office.

I drove west to Denver. Once there, I stopped and asked directions. I made my way through the heavy downtown traffic and located the Western Union office.

No money had arrived. I had parked on the street in front of the telegraph office. I kept checking, making my last call right at ten. Still nothing. I slept in the back seat of the Model A and would check again at 7:00 a.m.

I awoke and checked my watch. As always, when I glanced at the watch Beverly had given me for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, my thoughts went back to her. It was eight o'clock – seven Denver time. I got to the door of the telegraph office just as a man was unlocking it to open the office. He remembered me.

"It's here," he said. "What's your mother's maiden name?"

"Maiden name?" I asked, then remembered they do ask a key question to make certain the money is going to the right person. "Oh . . . Dotts," I said. Then I spelled it, "d-o-t-t-s." He reached in his drawer and removed two bills, handing me a ten and a five.

It was dusk when I saw the red neon tubing, high on a tall brick building, illuminating the evening sky with, "Hotel Paso del Norte." I parked the car, walked up the steps, entered the hotel lobby and asked directions to Biggs Field. I was informed I was on the west side of El Paso and the air base was northeast of the city.

At the base, I was given directions to my squadron. I located the correct barracks. There I met Jim Mac Manus, a private first class from Brooklyn. He wore a single chevron on his shirtsleeves, indicating his rank and was to be ball turret gunner on Havener's crew. The enlisted men of our crew were assigned bunks along the north side with another crew's EM south of the isle.

Mac Manus and I took the Model A to the post office. In the mail that had caught up with me was a note from Flight Officer George Crawford, who was stationed right there on the base. He had survived the big washout at SAACC, went through navigation school and was commissioned flight officer, one step below second lieutenant.



The next morning I met the remainder of Havener's crew. The officers were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Havener, Casper, Wyoming, airplane commander; co-pilot Bill Klasen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.; navigator, Jim Shulman, Cleveland, Ohio, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. and bombardier, Connor K. (C. K.) Salm, Madison, Indiana, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Enlisted men were, tech sergeant Virgil Rathborn, engineer, Norwalk, Ohio; staff sergeant Bill Alder, armor gunner, Buchanan, Tennessee; PFC Jim McManus, ball turret gunner, Brooklyn, New York and tail gunner, private Dick Rezanka, Chicago. I remained a corporal, and served as radio operator, manning the right waist .50 calibre machine gun.

We commenced training as a crew, flying war-weary B-17s. Engines caught fire, tires blew out upon landing and caught fire and the radio room equipment seldom worked, preventing me from accomplishing assigned tasks all radio operators were required to complete before going to combat.

I received letters from a number of old friends, including Beverly Pitt and Edythe Danielson. Beverly had gotten married. Her letter said one day we'd have homes with white picket fences and our children would play together. Edythe had completed nurse's training.

I had attempted several times to locate George Crawford at his barracks. Since he had told me an uncle and aunt operated a shoe store in downtown El Paso, I went to town and looked them up, only to learn George had shot himself in the foot and was at the base hospital.

Jim Basara, who had been at Columbia and Sioux Falls, was then at Biggs Field. He wanted me to drive him across the border to Mexico where liquor was not rationed. He had learned of a bridge crossing the Rio Grande 40 miles east that was not guarded by MPs, so no passes were necessary.



**Jim Basara and R. J. at Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas, 1944.**



The chow at Biggs was the best I had experienced in the service. The mess hall juke box featured a wide variety of big band music. Popular at that time "The Last Time I Saw Paris."

Most of my mail still came addressed to "R. J." Jeep had completed primary training at Twenty-Nine Palms, California and was in advanced training at Marfa, Texas, 200 miles south of me. George Grider, who had always expected to fly fighters, was co-pilot on a bomber.

We completed a training flight early one afternoon and I took advantage of the free time to look up George Crawford at the base hospital.

"They're gonna court-martial me," he said routinely. "They say I shot myself to keep from going overseas."

At Christmas, 1944, my thoughts traveled back. The Christmas of '42, Beverly's gift to me was the shaving kit I still used. I gave her the cedar chest. And, at Christmas of '43, I gave her the engagement ring. Beverly had phoned me at Route 3, telling me we couldn't be together as planned since she was flying to D. C. to start her job at National Airport. The Christmas of '44, I would drive the 200 miles to Marfa and spend the day with Jeep.

"We made one flight over your field here," I explained to Jeep as we ate at his mess hall, "and I dropped a handkerchief parachute with a note."

"I never got it," Jeep replied.

"Ah, but it's the thought that counts!" I said chuckling.

"Did you hear that Eddie was killed in action?" Jeep asked.

"Mom wrote me about that. Really a sad situation."

"I can still hear Eddie's mom. 'Now, you boys promise me you'll look after wee Eddie'."

Back at Biggs Field, we continued training in war weary B-17s, at times flying as far west as Needles, California.

Dick Rezanka, our tail gunner, dubbed people with special names. He referred to the engineer, Virgil Rathborn, as "Basil," for the movie star, Basil Rathbone. "Basil" was also oldest of the crew, so Dick also referred to him as "the old man." The armor gunner, Bill Alder, became "Bluke." Mac Manus, the ball turret gunner, was "Boris," after the film actor, Boris Karloff, who played the monster in "Frankenstein." In turn, C.K. Salm, our bombardier, dubbed Dick Rezanka, "Rosey," a take-off on his last name. Rosey dubbed me "Mark," for Mark Wayne Clark, the famed WWII army general. I figured I had lucked out.

Rosey's aunt, who lived in El Paso, had a spare car, a Stutz, she loaned Rosey while he was at Biggs Field. At night we went out on "fuel transfer" missions. Rosey, Boris and I cruised the base, looking for unsuspecting vehicles from which we could siphon gas. We found the best opportunity at the night meetings of the intelligence officers. We tapped the command cars parked outside the Intelligence Office.

One night, we filled several five-gallon cans, sat them in the back seat of my Model A and drove out into the desert to "transfer fuel." I commenced filling the Model A gas tank. The gas cap was centered just ahead of the



windshield. As I poured gas into my tank Rosey and Boris stashed filled cans beneath sand dunes. Rosey had taken a can out of the back seat and headed for a nearby sand dune. Boris grabbed the last can.

"Hey, Mark," shouted Boris. "I spilled gas on the car seat here. What should I do?"

"Why doncha light a match and dry it out?" I shouted back sarcastically.

Boris lit a match and set fire to the right front seat, then jumped back nervously. I lowered the can I held, sat it down on the sand away from the flame, reached the two pins that held the burning seat, quickly removed them, grabbed the seat and pulled it out of the car. Rosey and I rapidly tossed several hands full of sand on it until the flame was extinguished.

"Jeeze!" said wide-eyed Boris, a routine reaction of our ball turret gunner.

To purchase liquor in the U. S., it was necessary to fork over ration stamps. (Plus the cash, of course) But, just across the Rio Grande River liquor was not rationed and the prices were said to be low.

For some time Jim Basara spoke of his desire to obtain some liquor by crossing the Mexican border about 40 miles east of the base where there was an unguarded bridge. That meant no MPs. One evening, Jim and I gassed up the Model A from cans we had filled by siphoning from the command cars parked outside the Intelligence office and taken to the desert. We drove the 40 miles to the bridge crossing the Rio Grande and into the Mexican village of Guadalupe.

Jim spoke Spanish and could bargain with the Mexican merchants. He purchased the liquor he wanted, plus a bottle of tequila he picked up at a low price for good measure. I bought a bottle of bourbon. When we reached the bridge it was closed. We had failed to take into consideration the fact there was one hour difference between U. S. time and Mexican time. We were locked in Mexico.

"The bridge at Juarez will be open," Jim reasoned, "but we don't have passes."

"Oh-oh!" I said. "MPs."

"We gotta get back to base," said Jim. "I'll ask directions."

I stopped the car near a corner where several Mexicans were gathered.

"Donde el Ciudad Juarez?" Jim commenced.

He received directions. Jim had worn his dress OD uniform. I wore my flight coveralls over my OD's and really looked like a civilian mechanic.

We were soon headed west on a dirt road filled with potholes, kicking up lots of dust and bouncing over the rough road. In spite of my effort to miss the potholes, I was striking a few. I noticed the motor was straining and felt a slight pull to the right. I stopped the car. Jim and I got out. The right rear tire was flat. I had a spare tire but no jack.

We saw a number of Mexican men around a bonfire on the side of the road. Jim walked over to them, explained our problem in Spanish, asking if they would mind lifting the rear end of the car. I loosened the lugs. Around ten of them came over and picked up the rear end of the car. I pulled the



wheel off and slipped the spare on, quickly tightening the lugs. Jim opened the car door, removed his bottle of tequila, removed the cap and handed it to one of the Mexicans. He took a swig and handed the bottle to one of the other men. I told Jim they could let the car down. He translated my message and the tequila drinking Mexicans lowered to rear end of the car.

"Gracias, amigos," Jim called as I gave the lugs a final turn of the wrench.

Jim told the Mexicans to take the bottle with them. They walked away a happy group. We got back in the Model A and headed west for the international bridge linking Juarez and El Paso.

The lights of Juarez on the south side of the Rio Grande and El Paso on the north, illuminated the sky ahead as we drove west. On the bridge I stopped at a little booth. An MP approached the passenger side of the car, asking Jim for his pass.

"I'm afraid I don't have one," Jim confessed.

"Step out of the car," said the MP.

Jim followed the MP to the little booth where he provided particulars on his military address then returned to the car.

"Oh, boy," said Jim. "I shoulda worn my flight coveralls like you did. He must've taken you for some kinda civilian mechanic."

Back at Biggs the next morning, Jim was called to his orderly room and restricted to the base. He and his crew shipped overseas a few days later.

The morning after our little trip across the border, our crew went up on a training flight as did the other crew in our barracks. At the end of the day we returned to the barracks, glanced across the isle to notice the other crew's beds were not made as were ours. Instead, the mattresses were rolled and resting on the bare bunk springs. The men's foot lockers were missing and all their clothing had been removed. The crew had crashed into Mount Franklin just west of the base. All had been killed.

February rolled around. We had completed our overseas training and awaited shipping orders. I planned a quick trip to Los Angeles in my Model A, a 2,000 mile round trip, to see Iona Robertson, my high school girl friend. I applied for gas rationing stamps, telling the officials I had to drive my car home to Iowa.

With the gas we had appropriated from Intelligence vehicles in five-gallon cans in the back seat of the car, I figured the gas stamps would allow me to buy sufficient additional gas to make the trip to L. A. and back. I told Rosey, but none of the other crew members, I would be AWOL a few days. He had to return the Stutz to his aunt in El Paso.

Except for our training flights over it, I had never been to California. I found myself driving long distances between towns and became very hungry by the time I reached the Imperial Valley, a vegetable growing area. Suddenly, I spied a head of cabbage that had fallen from one of the produce trucks and was resting on the highway ahead. I stopped, got out, picked it up and ate raw cabbage for miles and miles. Iona's letter had given me street directions.



When I reached 523 North La Brea in Inglewood, Iona gave me an "old buddy from home" greeting. We went out to dinner, then to a dance where Sam Donahue's orchestra was playing at a dance hall on the beach. It was very foggy, but we finally arrived back at her apartment. I was exhausted from the trip and tipsy from the drinks. The conversation got around to Beverly. I found myself on a crying jag. Iona, who had recently gone through a divorce, was the most understanding person I could have been with at that time.

She cooked an early breakfast. We kissed goodbye. I promised to write when I had an overseas address and commenced the trip back to Biggs Field, speeding across the desert. Late in the afternoon the motor developed a clanking noise. I slowed down and made it into a small town where I located a repair shop. The owner came out and listened to the motor.

"Rod's out, soldier," he determined. "Shut 'er off! Don't want it to go through the block."

"Oh, boy! And I have to get to El Paso. Our B-17 crew's leavin' for overseas."

"Too late to do anything today. We're closin'. I'll get to it first thing in the mornin'."

We pushed the Model A into the garage.

"Do you have a phone I can use?" I asked.

"In the office there," said the garage owner, pointing toward a narrow doorway.

"I'd like to make a collect call."

"Go right ahead."

I walked into the office and sat down on a well padded chair, lifted the receiver from its hook and spoke into the mouthpiece, asking the operator to place the call. I gave the operator Iona's phone number.

When Iona came on the line I explained my predicament, telling her I'd be spending the night in the back seat of my Model A with a rod out - locked in a garage. She purred like a kitten, saying she wished I was back in her apartment so we could spend another night together.

At dawn the next morning I was up. In almost no time, the mechanic was at work on the motor. It was close to noon, El Paso time, when the car was ready. I was on the road again.

When I arrived in Las Cruces, 40 miles west of El Paso, the sun was going down. I stopped for gas at a filling station and explained to the owner I would be going overseas and that my Model A was for sale.

"What'r ya askin'?"

"Just what I paid for it . . . one sixty-five."

"I'll take it!" he said immediately, "if ya can wait'll the bank opens in the mornin' to get your money."

That night I slept in his filling station. The next morning, before coming to the station the owner went to his bank, then came by and opened the



station. I signed over the title. He paid me. I handed him the keys, boarded a bus to El Paso and reached the base late in the day.

I went immediately to the post office and asked if I had any mail.

"Where the hell have you been, Clark?" asked the GI mail clerk.

"Right here," I said calmly.

"Your crew is about to ship out," he said, handing me several letters. That answered my big question. The crew had not shipped out yet. "They've been lookin' everywhere for you."

"That's funny," I said, as if puzzled, still sorting through my mail, "Now, I'm lookin' for them."

The next morning we left for Lincoln, Nebraska. There was no time for discussing where I'd been.

Parents, wives and girl friends of our crew had gathered at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. Rosey's and Jim Shulman's parents threw us a party. We ate a hearty dinner. The after dinner conversation got around to my AWOL trip to California. I overheard one of the older ladies come down on the side of discipline. I figured that was a good time for me to step outside for a little fresh air.

Later, Rosey revealed that Bill, our co-pilot, had taken enough of the banter. "If any of us had the guts, we woulda done the same thing." That put an end to the discussion. Pictures of our crew were taken while I was out walking.



**Havener's crew (except me) at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln, Nebraska, just before flying to England.**



The next morning I met my dad at the base day room. We only had a few minutes to visit. Paul and I had taken out an allotment, which meant a portion of our pay was matched by Uncle Sam and sent regularly to my parents.

"Mom and I really feel guilty takin' you boys' money!" Dad said.

"Oh," I came back. "You mean as if it's blood money?"

"Well, something like that. What we can do is invest it in real estate so you guys'll have somethin' when ya get back."

"Whatever you decide is okay with me."

In a few hours our crew was flying east over Iowa.

The next evening, we landed at frigid Goose Bay, Laborador. It was bitter cold. We could see our breath in the crisp frigid air. The airport runway and concrete aprons were covered with high snowdrifts and hard-packed snow. We spent the night there. John received secret orders that were not to be opened until we had taken off and were out to sea. Early the next morning, out over the ocean, John read the orders: "Proceed to London, England."

The next morning, we took off for Greenland. We flew for hours over the north Atlantic. Late that afternoon, we flew between mountains in the fjords until we reached an air base. We spent the night there and would fly back up the fjord to leave Greenland for Iceland the next morning.

We appreciated flying a new plane, especially after training in those war wearies at Biggs. The radio equipment actually worked properly. I was able to obtain "radio fixes," entailing setting one of my transmitters and a receiver to a special radio frequency, and by sending out a code message, contact three ground stations automatically at once, requesting a "fix" of our location while in flight. The procedure called for holding the code key down for one minute, sending out a continuous tone picked up by the three widely separated ground stations. The lead station responded with map coordinates of our precise location at the time the prolonged signal was received by the three ground stations.

I reported the coordinates to Bill, the co-pilot, and he applied them to his map, figured the plane's air speed and direction, and reported our precise location to John, our pilot. We were often flying in or above an overcast. It was easy to stray off-course.

I wore headsets for the radio work, shutting out the roar of our four big Pratt & Whitney airplane engines and the constant rushing wind. I was responsible for obtaining weather reports of points ahead from ground stations and became involved in radio transmissions between airplanes. At times we radio operators found it necessary to contact each other while in formation. As often as possible, I switched to "Intercom" for keeping abreast of conversations of the other crewmembers inside our "17." Between assignments, I listened to popular music and news on BBC broadcasts.

We flew up the fjords in Greenland, a land covered with ice. Rumor had it that one of the military planes had hit the rocky side of the fjord and that the crashed bomber and its crew were still frozen in the ice. We looked out the



windows as we glided up the fjord, but never saw anything of the kind. At the airstrip where we landed, Rosey and I located a flying boat and got inside, sat on the plywood floor and looked all around from inside, wondering how it would feel, landing on water. We remained at the Greenland airbase one night, then took off for Iceland the next morning, back up the fjord, still not seeing any crashed plane on either side.

We landed at the military base outside Keflavik, Iceland and were assigned Quonset huts for barracks. Our crew's officers were housed in one hut and we enlisted men were housed in another. Almost immediately, Rosey informed me we were on a coral island. Coral dust in the air affected his asthma. He commenced to wheeze and was barely able to breathe. He asked me to walk with him to the first aid shack so he could get a shot of adrenalin. He feared he may need help before he got there. Iceland was not covered with ice like Greenland, but did have a small ice cap at its center.

The weather closed in and we were unable to continue our flight to England. Mail call brought us letters that had been addressed to us at Briggs Field. The base loudspeaker system played the latest recording of the big Harry James orchestra, "I'm Beginning to See the Light," vocal by Kitty Kallen. As I listened I read a newly arrived letter from Beverly. Sleigh bells!

The ship carrying supplies from the U. S. to Iceland was sunk by a German sub. The amount and quality of mess hall food commenced to decline. John, our pilot, and Bill, the co-pilot, checked often with the field operations shack for the latest weather information. The North Sea, which we had to cross to reach the United Kingdom, was overcast to the point where we were not permitted to take off. Weathered in on the coral island we exchanged U. S. dollars for Icelandic Krona and quickly learned the values of the various Icelandic coins and bills.

I told Rosey I intended to walk to town. Keflavic was a mile or so south of the airbase at the southwest tip of the island on the North Sea. Rosey didn't think he should try the long walk. Asthma forced him to breathe as little as possible. He prayed the weather would lift so we could leave the island.

I set out alone, walking across a crust of snow toward the little town. It was winter, and although it had been a bright sunny day, it was a very short one, with the sun going down as I made my way over the crusty snow. I finally reached the edge of the little town and walked along a street of quaint shops. All had French-type show windows, with dividers and many small panes of glass. The store fronts reminded me of "days of yore" paintings featured on Christmas cards.

I gazed in the store windows along the north side of the street, my view aided by the sun setting in the west. I finally entered a corner shop. Two young blond, blue-eyed ladies busied themselves behind a long counter, the first non-American I had encountered since the episode in Mexico. I spied a rack of ladies' scarves. One of the clerks approached me as I ran my fingers over a sheer light blue headscarf. I envisioned my sister, Marj, wearing it.



I spoke to the lady clerk. My English seemed to baffle her. She removed the scarf from the rack and said something in Icelandic, imparting no geniality. I wondered what Icelandic girls might have been told about American GIs. I handed her an Icelandic bill, figuring if the transaction required more than the amount of the bill, she would find a way to ask for more. She slipped the scarf into a paper sack, leaving it on the counter, walked to a cash register behind the counter and rung up the sale, returning to hand me several coins. I smiled as I slipped the change into my left front pants pocket and picked up the small paper bag from the counter top. She watched me, grudgingly returning the smile just briefly. I glanced at the other young lady as I was leaving the store. She remained stoic.

Back at the airbase, the officers were discussing the possibility of an early morning take-off since weather over the North Sea was expected to lift.

In the air the next morning, I busied myself contacting radio stations in Scotland for weather reports. We landed at Nutts Corner, Ireland. John and Bill, without the rest of the crew, flew the plane to Warrington, England. The rest of us rode the GI trucks across Wales to Liverpool where young boys chased our trucks shouting, "Gum, Chum." Those of us who had gum, tossed sticks out to them. They scrambled on the cobblestone street for the gum. We rode on to cold, damp Stone, England, where we met up with John and Bill who had arrived by truck after delivering the plane to Warrington. We so desperately wanted to keep that new B-17 for flying combat missions.

Our entire crew rode by truck across England, through the city of Ipswich in northeast England, taking a narrow road north and east for 16 miles to a small village named Mendlesham, then on northeast a few miles to our base. There, we saw expansive farm fields with concrete airstrips. Back to the north, faded olive drab colored Quonset huts dotted the hilly landscape.

We became crew number 91, assigned to Squadron Seven of the 34<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force. The mighty Eighth was known for flying daylight missions with formations of 1,000 bombers plus 500 escort fighters. The British bombed targets throughout Europe at night.

A letter arrived from Jim Basara's mother in Chicago, stating Jim had also been assigned to the Eighth, but had been killed on his first combat mission.

Allied airmen taken prisoner could expect better treatment as officers. The Germans considered sergeants to be officers. Virgil (Pop) Rathborn, our engineer, had been a tech sergeant for many months. Bill Alder, armor gunner, was a staff sergeant. PFC Jim Mac Manus, PVT Dick Rezanka and I were promoted to sergeant.

Each of us bought a used bicycle. We rode over to check the blackboard in the operations room each night to learn if we were scheduled to fly the next morning. On the night of April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1945, my name was on the board. I wouldn't be flying with our crew, but was to take the place of another crew's ill radio operator. I got little sleep that night, knowing I had to be up very early for my first combat mission. I thought of all my brothers and sisters



and my parents. I thought of Beverly and that it must be for the best, she's married to someone else with my life on the line. Still, I heard sleigh bells.

One of the noncoms from the squadron orderly room appeared in our hut at 2:30 a.m., April 4<sup>th</sup>, with a roster on a clip board and a flashlight, awakening those of us who were scheduled to fly. We walked to the mess hall in the early morning darkness, then each looked for his group's meeting. I joined the other radio operators in a Quonset hut known as the radio shack, where a tech sergeant explained the various materials we would be taking with us, emphasizing the importance of protecting the secret radio codes.

From the radio shack, I joined other enlisted men and officers in the operations room. We looked at huge maps on a wall, as high-ranking officers with pointers, described the target, assembly area, flight altitude, bomb run, weather conditions expected at the target area and a myriad of other necessary details. Target for the day was Kiel, Germany, on the North Sea. We were to drop penetration bombs, especially designed to drive themselves deep into the thick concrete earth, and take out the submarine pens.

I thought back to the last time I was home. Dad had shown me a plan he had drawn for doing that job, penetrating down through yards of earth to blow up concrete submarine pens. He submitted his plan to the War Department and received a reply thanking him for submitting his idea and explaining the department was already developing a penetration bomb. So, we would be dropping the newly developed penetration bombs, even if they weren't from Dad's plan.

Each radio operator carried two canvas bags filled with printed materials, heaved them onto the back of GI trucks, then rode with members of other crews to the flight line. It was still very dark and hours before daylight.

I had a question regarding procedure that I didn't get to ask in the radio shack, so I warmed up one of the transmitters and a receiver to contact one of the radio operators on another plane in our squadron. I put on my headset and commenced sending code. We were off the ground and headed out over the English Channel when I finally made contact. I quickly obtained the information I needed, shut down the radio equipment and flipped the selector switch to intercom, so I could hear the other crewmembers conversing. If the pilot or co-pilot required a weather report or radio fix, I would be contacted over the intercom.

We climbed upward through a heavy overcast. The pilot announced we had reached 10,000 feet and ordered us to put on oxygen masks. Above that altitude, oxygen decreased, endangering life. The oxygen mask hoses were similar to stretchable vacuum cleaner-type hoses and plugged into the oxygen pipes that ran along the inside of the fuselage, a few inches above the floor. The "relief tube" was inside the bomb bay, next to the radio room door.

Eventually, the pilot announced we had climbed to 30,000 feet and that the temperature outside the plane was approximately 60 degrees below zero. We had flown above the overcast. We were warmed by heat from the plane's



engines and heavy clothing. We wore our OD clothing beneath our flight coveralls and carried .45 calibre pistols on combat missions. I looked down to see vast farm fields separated by the famed "Autobahn," the world's most advanced highway system, far beneath. Germany was a beautiful country.

We had to maintain radio silence as we approached the target. The bombardier took control of the plane, flying it with his bombsight, from the initial point, referred to as the "IP," to the target, then dropping the bombs. Wearing my headset, as usual, I switched to "intercom" and listened to the conversation between the bombardier and the pilot. There was a small window just above the radio table on my left. I knew the rapidly appearing explosions dotting the sky among the bombers were "flak" bursts and suddenly realized shrapnel could tear through the thin aluminum skin of the plane at any second. I reached beneath the radio table for the one-foot square piece of flak suit, a flexible flat square metal piece, covered with canvas, I had been given at take-off for flak protection. Which body area should I cover? My face? My heart? No matter which I selected, a lot of me was going to be left exposed, so I sat on the square chunk of flak suit at the radio table, listening on the intercom to the other crew members as the bombardier took control of the plane, flying it to the target.

One of the B-17s in our formation was hit by flak and went into a spin. As it spiraled down, I was sure it would take out a few other bombers beneath it in formation. I kept wondering why the crew didn't bail out. The spinning 17 swirled down past the other planes and was out of sight. No one got out.

As the bombs dropped from the bomb bay, our plane lifted. Over the intercom, the bombardier called, "Let's get t' hell outa here!" The pilot took control of the plane again and called me on the intercom, asking that I check the bomb bay, forward of the radio room, to make certain all the bombs had released and dropped. I opened the door between the radio room and bomb bay to see no bombs in the racks and notified the pilot. The bomb bay doors closed. We turned 180 degrees in formation and headed back to England.

Our raid at the North and Baltic Seas had to be a success. It was feared the enemy would rely on its U-boat fleet to hang on, delaying surrender.

There was dead silence on the intercom. I kept thinking that if I'd have been with my regular crew, Rosey, back in the tail gunner's position, and I, in the radio room, would be on the intercom singing one of our favorite songs, "Don't Fence Me In," "The Air Corps Song" or "The Great Titanic," as we had when stationed at Biggs Field after completing our training flight for the day. My thoughts drifted back to the plane I saw spiral down. Why didn't anyone bail out?

We landed late that afternoon at our base, the 34<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, and went immediately to the de-briefing room where we were offered a shot of whiskey or a cup of hot chocolate. The debriefing officer asked if I had witnessed anything unusual during the mission. I told him I saw one B-17 hit by flak near the target, that went down and no one had gotten out. I continued drinking my cocoa.



That night at the operations shack, John and Bill pressed the squadron commander to assign me back to our regular crew. The major told them it was too late. I had already been scheduled to fly with the other crew the next day. Bill became adamant, reminding the major of the reason we had trained together many months – to get a smoothly functioning team for combat when the chips were down. Finally, the major went into his office, made a couple phone calls and came back. He told John and Bill they had their radio operator back. We had been assigned a B-17 named "R For Roger." The plane's record when we got it was 98 attempts to reach the target. It made it only 22.

It was another sleepless night. I thought of everyone at home and wondered if brother Paul, in the Philippines with the Seabees, had gotten my code telling him where I was. I finally faded off to sleep, thinking of Beverly.

In no time it was 2:30 a.m. We were being awakened for another combat mission. Didn't I just fall asleep? I kept trying, in agony of awakening, to determine the date and finally recalled that I'd hit the sack the night of the fourth. It had to be the morning of April 5<sup>th</sup>.

I went through the routine I had experienced the day before, in the dark, but with my own crew. Jim Mac Manus, our ball turret gunner, was ill with the flu and remained in the hut. The rest of us trudged to the mess hall, ate chow and attended our individual briefings. A ball turret gunner from another crew was temporarily assigned to our crew.

The enemy had introduced jet aircraft in combat. Our target for the day was a jet airfield near Nuremberg, in southwest Germany. The Mighty Eighth was to assemble its various echelons over Europe.

I jumped down from the truck onto the tarmac with my two large canvas bags. Rosey was up on the right wing, helping Pop gas the plane. When he finished, he jumped down and assisted Alder mount machine guns in the waist. I sat the bags down, then pushed the first of the bags up and into the open waist door. Suddenly the port engine on the right wing started. A wild whoosh of wind from its spinning propeller whipped several papers out of the bag that was still on the ground and sent them flying into the darkness.

Before any more pages could get away, I hoisted the second bag onto the plane, then pulled myself up and into the fuselage. I was headed for the cockpit to ask if there would be time for me to return to the radio shack for replacement copies of the missing pages. I looked at the bullet container on the airplane floor near the right waist gun. Rosey was loading a belt of bullets into the machine gun. The yellow and black wood container looked familiar. Dragging the bags along the floor through the waist of the plane, I hesitated and read the printing on the bullet container: ".50 calibre – DMOP." What a small world, I thought, bullets from DMOP. I could see Beverly with gloves on, sitting at a conveyor, loading two handfuls of bullets into a carton.

"Hey, Rosey," I shouted, "those bullets you're loadin' there . . . they're from the ordnance plant where I worked back home."

"Well," he came back, "Why don't we try 'em anyway?"



"Some of my radio stuff blew away when they revved that engine!"

"Oh no!" said Rosey, pulling the bullet belt through the machine gun's chamber. "Hope ya didn't lose something you'll need today."

I quickly made my way through the waist, radio room and across the narrow bomb bay catwalk. The door between the bomb bay and cockpit was open. John was in the pilot's seat, working with an overhead lever. Bill occupied the co-pilot's seat and was going through the pre-flight checklist with John. I tapped John on the shoulder. He turned and shoved his right headset aside, so he could hear me. Bill pulled his left headset away from his ear.

"When that engine started up, some of my radio papers were blown away." I shouted over the roar of the engines.

"Oh," Bill shouted, "I'm sorry. I started up that engine. I shoulda checked back there first."

"Would there be time for me to go back to the . . .?"

"No," John interrupted, "we're about to line up for take-off."

"Okay," I said. "I'll just hafta make out the best way I can."

"I can radio the tower and see if someone can get what you need out to the flight line before we take off, but I sure doubt it," John said.

"Okay . . . I'll check what's missing and call ya on the intercom."

I hurried back across the bomb bay catwalk into the radio room and commenced sorting through the papers, determined what was missing, then placed the throat mike at the side of my neck and got on the intercom.

"The most important item missing is the secret radio code for today."

"Oh, my God," came Bill's voice over the intercom. "We'll see if they can get another set out here. Sorry, I didn't warn you guys before I started that engine."

As the pilots raced the roaring engines to obtain a sufficient warm-up, I tested my radio transmitters and receivers. We taxied out on the tarmac.

"Pilot to radio," came John's voice over the intercom.

"Go ahead, John," I said.

"The tower can't help on that radio code. We're in line for take off."

"Roger . . . out," I replied, hoping I would not need the secret code.

Daylight was held back by heavy dark overcast skies. I listened on the intercom as John and Bill received takeoff instructions from the tower to takeoff into the "soup." Following a line of other B-17s, we raced down the runway, took off, climbed through turbulent air surrounding the black clouds and made our way through heavy rain and out over the English Channel.

Looking through the skylight, I saw another 17 zoom across, right to left, just above us. John nosed our plane downward to avoid collision. The plywood camera well cover at the center of the radio room floor and I hit the ceiling. As John pulled the aircraft back to straight and level, I came crashing down to sit on the edge of the camera well with my feet down inside it. The plywood cover was right beside me. Luckily, my swivel chair was on an immovable post.



When we loaded the plane before take-off, I had placed my parachute beneath the radio table. I got up, replaced the camera well cover, pulled out my parachute and placed it in front of me on top of the radio transmitter and sat back down at the radio table. Over the intercom, John asked if we were all okay. We each replied in the affirmative.

If conditions worsened, I intended to reach for the parachute quickly and snap it onto the parachute harness. We always wore our harnesses over our flight coveralls when flying.

The intercom conversation was disturbing. I could hear John talking to Bill, who sat next to him in the cockpit. Noise of roaring engines and passing wind prevented people from being heard inside the plane, so we all relied upon the intercom when flying.

Planes were unable to assemble into a formation and were now flying in all directions. We flew for hours in the soup, unable to see. Suddenly, Bill called me on the intercom, informing me the outside antenna for the cockpit radio equipment had iced over. Neither he nor John had been able to make radio contact with a ground station. He asked me to see if I could get a fix to determine our location.

I flipped the transmitter switch, looked up the frequency, set the dial properly and clicked out a code message, asking for the fix. I got no response, so I tried to call out by voice. I still got no response and informed Bill I had failed to make contact by voice or code. We decided my antenna must also be covered with ice, grounding my transmissions.

We continued to fly through the nasty weather we had encountered since takeoff, hours before. John and Bill checked our fuel supply. It was dangerously low. In an attempt to reach an altitude where the outside temperature would melt the ice, we commenced to descend. The plane went into a spin.

I grabbed my parachute and snapped it onto the harness. I was thrown out of my chair and onto the radio room floor, disconnecting my oxygen hose. The ball turret gunner rushed out of the turret, raced to the waist door and pulled the emergency handle. The door flew off. Rushing air swirled through the waist area inside the fuselage. The ball turret gunner, poised to bail out, turned to see me pulling myself up onto the chair. Suddenly, the plane leveled again. I plugged in the oxygen hose. He didn't jump.

The pilot and co-pilot fought the plane back to straight and level flight. We continued to come down, finally breaking through the clouds and into the clear. Down from the frigid high altitude, we hoped the outside ice would melt. We were using our last bit of fuel.

John and Bill sent out distress calls on the cockpit radio transmitter in an attempt to reach a ground station. I was using both code and voice, but was unable to get any response. John finally picked up a male voice on the cockpit receiver, apparently replying to his distress call. We had commenced homing in on the voice signal, realizing it could well be the voice of an English speaking German. We could be landing in enemy territory, but had to



bring our bomber in while we had sufficient fuel. If we landed at an enemy field, we had to be prepared to surrender and be taken prisoners-of-war.

He talked us in to his field. We landed at an emergency airstrip at Merville, France, where we could re-fuel and await the weather to clear.

I recalled how my dad had been to France a generation earlier. We enlisted men remained with the plane. After all, the waist door was missing. Anyone wishing to board the "R For Roger" could do it easily.



The officers got a ride into the French village of Merville where they walked the streets, purchased a bottle of wine and returned to the plane late that afternoon. The weather had lifted by 4:30 p.m. We took off and headed for our base in England. At the time we expected to see the white cliffs of Dover, we didn't. Bill thought Jim's calculations might be slightly off.

"Co-pilot to radio," came the call over the intercom.

"Roger, Bill." I responded.

"Could you get me a radio fix?"

"I'll give it a whirl."

I changed the selector switch to "radio" and attempted to reach a ground station by code, receiving an immediate response. I pressed the code key down, tightened the screw so it would remain down, sending out a continuous signal. I timed it. One minute. I loosened the key screw and the key came up to its normal position, ending the tone. I received immediate numbers for the coordinates and called Bill back on the intercom.



"Radio to co-pilot."

"Go ahead, Bob."

I read Bill the numbers I had received. He matched them to his map.

"Co-pilot to radio."

"Roger."

"This can't be right. Your fix has us coming in right over the Thames estuary. That's a forbidden area. Can you quickly get another fix?"

"Roger."

I repeated the procedure and relayed the coordinates to Bill.

"Same as the other," Bill said. "That's bad."

We had been instructed to avoid flying over London. The Thames estuary at London was laden with anti-aircraft guns. The British ack-ack gunners were under orders to shoot down any intruding aircraft.

"Oh-oh! Look down . . . the Thames estuary!" Bill exclaimed over the intercom. "That's London. We're definitely in the wrong place."

We were flying directly over the estuary. Luckily, our plane was equipped with "IFF" equipment. "IFF" stood for "identification friend or foe." A radio transmitter automatically sent out a signal, identifying our aircraft as an 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force bomber. That protection prevented our being shot down by British ack-ack fire. We flew on over London, then northeast to Mendlesham.

That night, the "ground-pounders," airmen's terminology for air corps personnel who did not fly, such as mechanics, went to work on R For Roger, checking cockpit instruments and replacing the waist door.

Years later, I saw a TV documentary on the history of the B-17. Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas Cowboys, a WWII B-17 co-pilot in the 493<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group, adjacent to our base, appeared in the documentary. He mentioned that day, when his B-17 had run out of fuel, landed in a French pasture and hit a tree.

After evening chow, Rosey and I checked the blackboard in the operations room. General Doolittle had scheduled the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force to fly a practice mission over England the next day, April 6<sup>th</sup>, with a "skeleton crew," which meant the ball turret gunner, tail gunner and armor gunner were not required to fly. But, Rosey chose to go. He would help Pop give the plane a pre-flight check and fill the tanks with fuel.

I kept recalling the plane I'd seen hit by flak and going down near Keil the day before. I still hadn't figured out why the crew didn't bail out.

We didn't have to be up quite as early since we were not flying combat, but were in our briefing rooms immediately after early chow. We were informed we'd be climbing through overcast and assemble over England at about 20,000 feet. As with other missions the final act was setting our GI wrist watches to synchronize with the flight commander's watch.

I placed my parachute under the radio table and sat on my swivel chair with headset on and throat microphone affixed by the ribbon that stretched around my neck. My oxygen mask was in its canvas holder hanging by the strap looping around my left shoulder to rest beneath my right arm.



We took off and commenced flying through the clouds. When reaching 10,000 feet, John, on the intercom, told us to put on oxygen masks. I opened the bag flap, removed the mask and placed it over my face, plugging its flexible hose into the oxygen supply line.

We finally climbed above the overcast and into the sunshine, I was able to complete the radio fixes and obtain the weather reports I had been assigned. We circled over England for hours in bright sunshine.

John finally received the order to descend from the pilot in the lead plane. When our turn came in descent order, our plane peeled off and circled downward through the thick overcast. The plane commenced to spin, just as it had the day before over the continent. I grabbed my parachute and snapped it on the harness. John and Bill pulled the plane out of the spin, climbed back above the fleecy white clouds and into the sunshine once more. Over the intercom we heard them discussing the ball and needle instrument. I gather it had caused the plane to go into the spin.

"Co-pilot to radio," I heard Bill's voice through my headset.

"Roger," I responded.

"Could you get us a weather report?"

"Roger . . . out."

I clicked out code calling for a northeast England weather report, then jotted down the ground station response and called Bill back on the intercom.

"Wind speed, 3 mph on the ground. Overcast starts at 3,000 feet. Tops out at 18,000. Anything more, Bill?"

"No, thanks," Bill replied, "that should do it. Out."

"Wanna try again?" we all heard John ask Bill.

"We'll be out of descending order with 15,000 feet of this soup to go through," Bill came back, "but . . . what else can we do?"

"Here we go," John said.

We felt the plane bank left and nose downward again. I glanced out the window to see we were already deep into the overcast. The plane tilted abruptly to the left.

"Not too much, John!" Bill called.

There was a ferocious rush of wind and I was thrown off balance. I tossed the headset onto the radio table, unplugged the oxygen hose, raced for the waist door and quickly pulled the emergency handle. The door should have fallen away just as it had the day before, but the hinge pins would not budge.

Thrown across the waist, I was pinned against the wall. Centrifugal force created a continuous swirling wind. My oxygen mask was forced down from my face to hang on my chin. My mouth, wind rushing through it, was forced wide open. I couldn't close it. I pulled as hard as I could to get away from the fuselage wall and across to the waist door again. The centrifugal force made it impossible for me to move. The plane was spinning toward the ground. One thought raced through my mind: "Mom won't like this."



Suddenly, the pressure on me let up slightly I made my way across the fuselage to the waist door, grabbed the emergency handle and yanked as hard as I possibly could. The handle with several strands of cable came out in my hand. The door pins were out of the hinges. The door didn't drop away as it should. Centrifugal force held the door tightly to the plane. I dropped the emergency handle, shoved against the waist door with both hands, pressing it out ahead of me. Outside, the wind took the aluminum waist door away as my forehead struck the horizontal tail fin. I was stunned. The next thing I knew, I was hanging across the fin with its leading edge crossways of my gut. I pressed my hands down on top of it. Assisted by the wind, I raised myself in an effort to sail over the tail fin and get free of the spinning plane.

Centrifugal force drew me in against the fuselage. I got both feet up on the tail fin and with the palms of my hands flat on the fuselage; I worked myself back, finally feeling a steel perforated tail gun shield. I pulled myself to the end of the tail gun and pushed myself away from the spinning plane.

I looked down to make certain the parachute was still on my chest, then grabbed the small chute handle. I hesitated, remembering a bailout training film that warned of pulling the ripcord too quickly. The parachute canopy and shroud lines could tangle with the tail fin and tail guns. I waited a few seconds, falling through the soup. I could no longer see the plane, so I pulled the ripcord. The chute blossomed nicely. I was floating down through thick fog, swinging from side to side.

I expected to hear the plane hit the ground and feared I was the only one to escape. I dropped through a snowstorm in the clouds. My swinging increased. The training film warned that too much oscillation could spill the canopy's air, causing it to collapse. I followed the film's directions, pulling the left set of shroud lines as I swung right, then the opposite pair to correct my swing to the left, finally diminishing the oscillation.

I hadn't heard our plane crash. I figured it must have reached the English Channel and had gone down in the water. That's probably the reason I didn't hear a crash, I thought.

Beneath me, I saw the top of another floating parachute canopy, then another, and two more appeared. I figured another plane must have been in trouble. I heard conversation beneath me, but couldn't make out what was said. There were two English farmers in the freshly harrowed farm field that was coming up fast. They each held a pitchfork, ready to stab.

From the training film, I remembered the precise procedure for a parachute landing. I planted both feet in the loose brown dirt, relaxed my knees to absorb the shock of hitting the ground, rocked forward to my knees, arose, then pulled the two lower shroud lines toward me, dumping the air from inside the canopy. Chatter behind me increased as I pulled the silk canopy and commenced folding it. I still held the chute handle. According to the training film, still being in possession of the handle was proof of having remained cool, calm and collected through the emergency. I was anxious to find out why the other plane's crew bailed out, but soon learned there was no



other plane in trouble. The parachutes I had seen were those of Bill, Jim, Pop and Rosey.

"We expected a Jerry invasion," said one of the farmers, pitchfork in hand. "Good thing he recognized the shoulder patch."

"Yes," said the other farmer, pointing to Rosey, "I saw this one swingin' back and forth up there and noticed the air force shoulder emblem. I called out, 'Yynk?' He hollered back down to me, 'Hi, 'ow the 'ell are ya?' When he said, 'Hi, 'ow the 'ell are ya,' I knew 'e was a Yynk!"

The English farmers' A's sounded like Y's. (or I's)

Luckily, our flight coveralls carried the air corps' shoulder emblem. The farmers invited us to the nearby farmhouse. We finished folding the silk chutes and walked with the two farmers to the house. Jim complained of back pain. Bill and Pop hobbled along on injured legs. Rosey and I seemed to be okay.

At the house, Bill thanked our hosts for their hospitality and asked if they had a phone. The farmers' wives prepared hot tea and got out a cake they said they had saved for a special occasion.

"With the rationing, you know," said one of the ladies, "but this is a special occasion!"

Bill obtained a number for our air base and got through by phone. Relaying the farmer's directions, he was assured a truck would be sent for us. We all sat down at the dining room table, ate delicious cake, sipped tea, conversed about our emergency event and awaited the arrival of a truck.

Back at the base, we were driven directly to the first aid shack. Bill and Pop had leg injuries. Bill ended up with the lower part of one leg in a cast. Jim's back was examined and treated. Rosey and I were given two sleeping pills each and were told to come back the next morning.

He and I walked west from the first aid shack and turned north where the path from the tarmac joined the road. Two ground-pounders met us at the junction.

"Who got out the waist hatch?" one of them asked.

Rosey and I hesitated and turned around to face the two.

"He did," said Rosey, pointing at me.

"I don't know how he ever got that door off. We couldn't find the right sized hinge pins last night, so we used oversized pins. We drove 'em in with a hammer."

I wanted to mash the bastard on the spot, but Rosey shoved me back.

"Wait a minute," said Rosey, "you've seen the plane? Did they get back with our plane?"

I had been so upset with what the mechanics had just said about driving hinge pins in that should have been set in for easy removal in an emergency, that I had almost missed the main point – John and C. K. had landed the plane! The mechanics went on to tell us that the right wing was drooping and rivets had popped in the radio room. They said the plane would be junked.



That evening at the officers' Quonset hut, Rosey and I learned what had happened in the plane after we bailed out.

C. K. had been unconscious, pinned against the plexiglas in the nose of the plane. John was nearly exhausted from fighting the spins – first to the right, straight and level a split second, then spinning to the left. C. K. came to and headed for the escape hatch just beneath the pilot on the left side of the plane. He looked up just as he was about to bail out and saw John in the cockpit, wrestling to get the plane under control. Unable to be heard over the incessant noise or to free his hands, John motioned with the back-jerk of his head for C. K. to come up to the cockpit. He climbed up, got into the co-pilot's seat and gave John the help he needed to pull the plane level enough to get it back to our base. The damaged plane would not respond properly to the controls, so both fought to glide down. They came in over a plane that was taking off and landed R for Roger crosswind on an unoccupied airstrip.

"Now I know why that crew didn't get outa their plane a couple days ago," I told Rosey as we walked back to our hut. "The plane I saw hit by flak on the Kiel run. Just like us today, they couldn't get out. Their plane was in a spin."

"Centrifugal force," said Rosey. "God! We were sure lucky to get out!"

That night, John was informed he would be required to fly with an officer of higher rank who would give him an instrument check to see if he had been making mistakes reading the instruments.

We took pictures on and around R for Roger the next morning. Rosey snapped one of me hanging on the tail fin as I had after getting out of the plane and striking my forehead there the day before when bailing out.





I was grounded for having allowed the secret code papers to blow away a couple days earlier and assigned to KP at the officers' mess.

After the three hectic days in the air, I welcomed the grounding. And, I thought, the food may be better than we got in the enlisted mens' mess hall. So, I avoided mention of the fact the articles of war say we can't be assigned KP as punishment. Maybe it would give me time to catch up on my letter writing.

The next morning, John went up for his instrument check and passed with flying colors. "Human error" had been ruled out.

Our crew was assigned a B-17 named "Gotta Haver," after June Haver, a popular movie star. Two large photos of June had been taped forward on the left side of the plane.



The crew was assigned a milk run mission, taking out a German rocket-launching site in France. "Milk run" was airmen's terminology for an easy mission – little or no enemy ack-ack or fighter plane resistance.

The work at the officers' mess was relatively easy and the food was good. I listened to popular music over the base loudspeaker system the British called the "Tannoy." For the first time, I heard "Nancy," by Frank Sinatra, written for his daughter. I also heard "Pompton Turnpike" by Charlie Barnett.



While I was grounded the remainder of the crew flew Gotta Haver on mop-up air strikes, getting in six missions, qualifying each crew member for the air medal.

On one of the combat missions, a brand new type of fighter aircraft, a German jet, fueled by kerosene, with the capability of remaining airborne only nine minutes, flew up to the right side of the plane. We had been instructed that the new enemy jet fighters were Messerschmidt-262s (ME-262). We knew they had .20 mm cannons in the nose. Bill looked out to see the jet pilot flying along beside him. Rosey told me the jet zoomed into his view behind the tail of the plane and opened fire. Rosey answered with his two .50 calibre machine guns. The jet was hit and went down.

We often saw the flickering yellow tail flames of German U-2 rockets streaking across the U. K. sky at night and could hear their put-put sounding engines.

One day I was standing in line at the over-crowded PX when all of us GIs heard the put-put of an approaching U-2. The engine sound suddenly ceased. Everyone in the place dropped to the floor. I crouched. Soon we heard an explosion in the distance and felt the shock. One of the huge wooden blackout curtains inside the PX bounced off its metal hooks and came crashing to the floor.

I paid little attention to the lump on the left side of my forehead from striking the tail fin when bailing out. It still gave me slight pain at times.

The night of April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945, we were lying around on our bunks, listening to "Midnight in Munich," an armed forces network musical program, over a short-wave radio receiver owned by one of the guys in our Quonset hut. We were able to hear the latest musical recording releases before they were played over radio stations back home. That night the soothing big band music suddenly ended.

"We interrupt this program to bring you a news bulletin," the GI announcer said grimly. "President Roosevelt has died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia."

He repeated the bulletin, then played "The Star Spangled Banner." The shocking news took me back nearly three years to the day Beverly and I were returning from Adair, Iowa, in old Jessie, the '29 Chevy. She had just told me she was a Democrat and how she admired President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"Some day he'll die," she said sadly, "and I'll cry."

Years later, her best friend, Zada Burrell, told those of us attending a Pleasantville Class of '40 luncheon, that Beverly had phoned her at Pleasantville the day Roosevelt died, crying so badly she could barely speak.

Those of us who had bailed out each received a small package from an international silkworm organization. Inside was a card with print stating we were sent this award for having saved our lives by parachutes made of silk and welcomed us into the Silkworm Club, reminding us silk was produced by



silkworms. Also inside was a little white plastic box with a transparent cover containing a half-inch long silver metal silkworm pin. I still have mine.

We also received a letter of commendation for having bailed out over Great Britain. It was signed by His Majesty King George VI.

Early one morning, I was awakened in my sack by something moving along on top of my OD colored blanket. I reared up to see a rat scampering down the blanket to my feet and off my sack into the darkness. I quickly got up and opened the canvas flap of my musette bag to make sure the almond Hershey candy bars and Spearmint gum had not been nibbled. They were safe.

There was time to get away from the base on special evenings. We rode GI trucks the 16 miles into Ipswich, a fairly large city, to attend dances that were held in a large ballroom. As we danced, everyone in the huge hall sang the well-known songs being played by the band on the stage.

Back home, I used to sing in soft tones as Beverly and I danced. Wouldn't she like everybody singing until the rafters rang?

"The White Cliffs of Dover," a very popular song, was introduced to the English by their favorite lady singer, Vera Lynn. It was a song the old ordnance plant gang sang as we rode in old Jessie. This song of hope was repeated often during the evening at the British dances. Everyone sang.

"There'll be bluebirds over,  
The white cliffs of Dover,  
Tomorrow just you wait and see.  
There'll be love and laughter,  
And peace ever after,  
Tomorrow when the world is free."

After a week on KP, I was re-assigned to flight duty with the aircrew, but there were no targets left to hit. We went on a training flight, a night mission. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force assembled over Belgium. The blackout was in effect, so our wing lights were not lit, making assembling a touchy matter. The pilots had to avoid colliding with other bombers in the darkness. We saw a tiny white light on the ground in the distance as we circled over Belgium. Jim, our navigator, told us it was Brussels.

Beginning May first, we commenced dropping food to the starving Europeans, having received permission from the Germans. In Holland, the people had suffered years of Nazi occupation and were starving. The average Dutch adult weighed 90 pounds.

One flight took us in very low over a Rotterdam soccer field. I went into the bomb bay to see that all the wooden crates of C rations had released and dropped, just as I had done when dropping bombs. All the crates had dropped except one, so I kicked it loose from the bomb rack and it fell away. At the end of the soccer field, strips of white bed sheets formed these words: "Thanks, Yanks."

Rosey suffered an asthma attack one evening after dark and asked me to go with him to the infirmary where he could get an adrenalin shot. His



wheezing increased as we started climbing up the infirmary hill. He finally sat down on the grassy hillside. I backed up to him and told him to get on my back. Wheezing badly, he got to his feet, slung his arms around my neck and held on. I grabbed his long legs and carried him piggyback up the hill. At the infirmary he received a shot and commenced to recover.

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the war in Europe ended. We rode our bikes to the officers club that night, partied, mainly on Scotch whiskey, then attempted to ride our bikes back to our huts.

We continued flying mercy missions, landing first at a Luftwaffe airfield just outside Nuremberg. There Rosey and I walked up to an ME-109 parked on the apron of a runway. It had a black propeller and hub with a yellow spiral circling the propeller hub. We knew it had been one of Goering's famed "Yellow Noses."

We flew on to Czechoslovakia and picked up 40 French ex-prisoners-of-war who packed the radio room as well as the waist. There was one young lady among them.

In the radio room on the way back to France, I was able to communicate with one of the ex-prisoners. He understood some of what I was saying and spoke in broken English. That, along with hand gestures, helped us understand each other. I explained I had to bail out of a plane. He wanted me to know he also had bailed out and opened his shirt to show me where a German fighter pilot had riddled him with machine gun bullets as he was coming down in his chute. The scars dotted his body from the right shoulder diagonally down to his left hip.

We landed at an airfield outside Paris. The French ex-prisoners got out of the plane and relieved themselves in the grass beside the runway. The lady squatted amidst her fellow Frenchmen. Trucks were coming for them. We exchanged goodbye waves, climbed back into Gotta Haver and took off.

Flying west across the English Channel on the way back to our bomb group, we spied the white cliffs of Dover. That landmark indicated we were on course. Rosey, in the tail section, and I, at the table in the radio room, entertained on the intercom with our favorite songs – "Don't Fence Me In," "The Air Corps Song," and "The Great Titanic." He was teaching me the words to the Michigan fight song. "Hail to the victors valiant, hail to the conquering heroes, hail, hail to Michigan, victors of the land." We recognized the English hedgerows and could navigate home by such familiar landmarks.

Mac Manus, Alder, Rosey and I were granted a short leave. We rode by truck to Ipswich, then took a train through the Midlands to London. We had our pictures taken in front of Prime Minister Winston Churchill's residence, Number Ten Downing Street. The next day, we traveled by train to Clacton-on-Sea, a resort town on the English Channel. We attended a dance. Just as we had experienced at Ipswich dances, everyone on the dance floor sang the songs as we danced. So did we.



**R. J. and "Rosey" Rezanka, tail gunner, on leave at Clacton on Sea, England (English Channel). Note: huge concrete blocks for halting invading Nazi tanks; barbed wire and anti-aircraft gun in the background.**



**Bill Alder and R. J. across from 10 Downing Street, London, Prime Minister Winston Churchill's residence.**



There, we met a charming young blue-eyed brunette who stood about 5'6" and must have weighed a shapely 120 pounds.

"Hi kids," she said in a crisp clear American dialect.

"Hi," the four of us replied, surrounding the young lady who spoke just like the girls back home. She was from Canada and had perfect teeth. Most of the British girls' teeth were less than good. I wondered if their decaying teeth could be the result of diet deficiency due to seven years of food rationing. We ignored the Limey ladies, enjoying the afternoon and evening with this "breath of fresh air" from our side of the ocean. I was selected to escort her home that night.

The next day the four of us took in the sights of the wartime resort town, taking a number of pictures at an anti-aircraft gun on the fortified English Channel beach. Prominent were huge square concrete blocks and barbed wire, erected as a defense against anticipated invading German tanks and storm troopers. About noon, we caught a train back to London, transferred to another for the trip through the Midlands to the Ipswich railroad station where GI trucks were loading and departing for the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force bases at Debach, Great Ashfield, Eye and Mendlesham.

Since the blackout was over, a number of the GIs had taken down the wooden air raid curtains in our hut. For the first time we could get light inside during the day.

Some of the boys were slightly miffed that Pop spent considerable time playing cards at the officers' hut and always came in late, waking them. One night before hitting the sack, a few of them filled a condom with water and slid it between his sheets, then made the bed up again. Pop came in, undressed in the dark, crawled into his sack and rolled into the inflated rubber, breaking it. He grumbled. The rest of us remained silent.

Another time, several of the boys captured a goat from the nearby pasture, forced it into the hut, and tied it in Pop's sack. Getting undressed in the dark, Pop pulled his covers down to find a sleeping partner greeting him with a "Bla-a-a!" He got up, untied the goat and ushered it outside. The rest of us were sound asleep, or course.

Rumors ran rampant that we would be transferred to the Pacific to help finish off the Japs. We prayed we would be sent via the U. S. and get some time at home, but knew we could be sent in the opposite direction.

The officers were talking of getting to London once more. We enlisted men put in for another brief London leave. It was granted. We took a train to London, rented a room at the same huge building where we had stayed before and started walking around the city. I spied a pretty young lady through an open hotel window. She wore a headset and worked away at the hotel switchboard. I struck up a conversation with her from the sidewalk. She finally agreed to meet me at five o'clock, when she got off.

I left the other crew members at our rooming quarters and walked to the hotel at 5:00 p.m. The young lady came out. She was about Beverly's height and weight, cute with soft brown eyes, dark hair and good teeth. We



exchanged names. I told her she'd have to lead the way because I was from another planet. She seemed amused at my stupid humor and led the way to a fine restaurant where I ate my first lobster dinner. Next, we were off to one of London's finest theaters where we enjoyed a stage play, a British comedy, making fun of "Yanks." I laughed with the crowd at the subtle British humor – even when it hurt.

After the show, we took a lorry to her home. Londoners were still celebrating the end of the war by keeping bonfires aglow. We saw several during our taxi ride. As we got out of the lorry near her home, a gang of short "Free French" soldiers dashed around the corner and out of sight. The young lady warned me the "Frogs" were treacherous and known to carry knives.

The next morning, Alder, Mac Manus, Rosey and I walked to the Red Cross Club in Piccadilly where I ordered tea with cream and sugar, as the English drank it, with breakfast. In the afternoon we located a pub, mingled with the Limeys, drank warm beer and exchanged jokes and tales. One lady made it clear that while the British people appreciated the help the Americans provided in winning the war, they would be happy when we left. "We're just too crowded," she said. The four of us ended up sitting on the curb of the broad busy street outside the pub finishing our pints of warm beer.

Back at our base we awaited orders to leave. Rosey and I laid out on blankets in the sun to write letters that included the latest news. We were going home. We would fly to the U. S., be granted 30-day leaves, transfer to B-29s, fly to Okinawa and commence bombing Japan.

One sunny afternoon, I "borrowed" a jeep, drove along the narrow dirt road to the little town of Mendlesham. There wasn't much doing there so I drove back, parking the jeep where I had found it.

One night, while listening to "Midnight in Munich," the announcer introduced a new song by Les Brown (and his band of renown), a band that had gained fame on the popular Bob Hope radio show. The song introduced that night was "Sentimental Journey." They played it several times and often after that first night. We commenced singing those meaningful words.

"Going to take a sentimental journey,  
Going to set my heart at ease,  
Going to take a sentimental journey,  
To renew old memories."

I blamed myself for the fact that Beverly wouldn't be there to meet me. Back at Sioux Falls less than a year earlier, when she had asked me to marry her, why couldn't I have just said, "Yes?!"

Both the officers and enlisted men of our crew sold our bikes and packed barracks bags for the flight home.

We were taken by truck to Debach and the 493<sup>rd</sup> bomb group. Rosey and I got to see Little Wheel, nickname of an old friend, for the last time. We were assigned a plane and ten passengers to take back with us.



We took off, flew north to Scotland, landing to re-fuel at Glasgow. After taking off again, we were flying through soup and a heavy crosswind in a mountainous area. Bill asked me to get a radio fix.

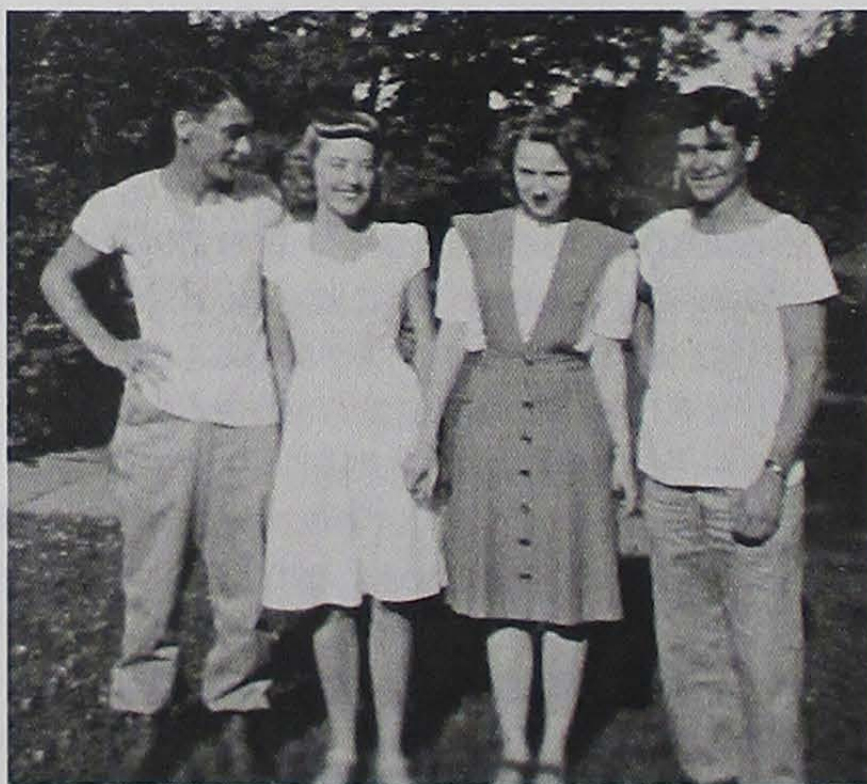
I contacted a ground station. The information indicating our exact location was sent back to me in code immediately. I got on the intercom and relayed the coordinates to Bill, who plotted them on his map and quickly told John to change course. We had been headed for a high mountain.

At Iceland, that first week in July, the sun did not set, giving us constant daylight. It was truly "The Land of the Midnight Sun." The coral dust in the air resulted in another asthma attack for Rosey. He had to receive a shot. The doctor wanted to ground him and keep him there for treatment. He and Bill pleaded with the doctor to let him get back to the states. The doctor allowed him to continue the flight.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945, we landed at Bradley Field, Connecticut. Rosey and I located a beer garden on the base and each enjoyed two cold bottles of Schlitz, the county's favorite beer.

We left the B-17 there and joined our ten passengers taking trains. Rosey and I rode to Chicago together. He got off there. We would stay in touch. I traveled on to Jefferson Barracks, outside of St. Louis, Missouri. I received a 30-day furlough and headed for Ames, Iowa.

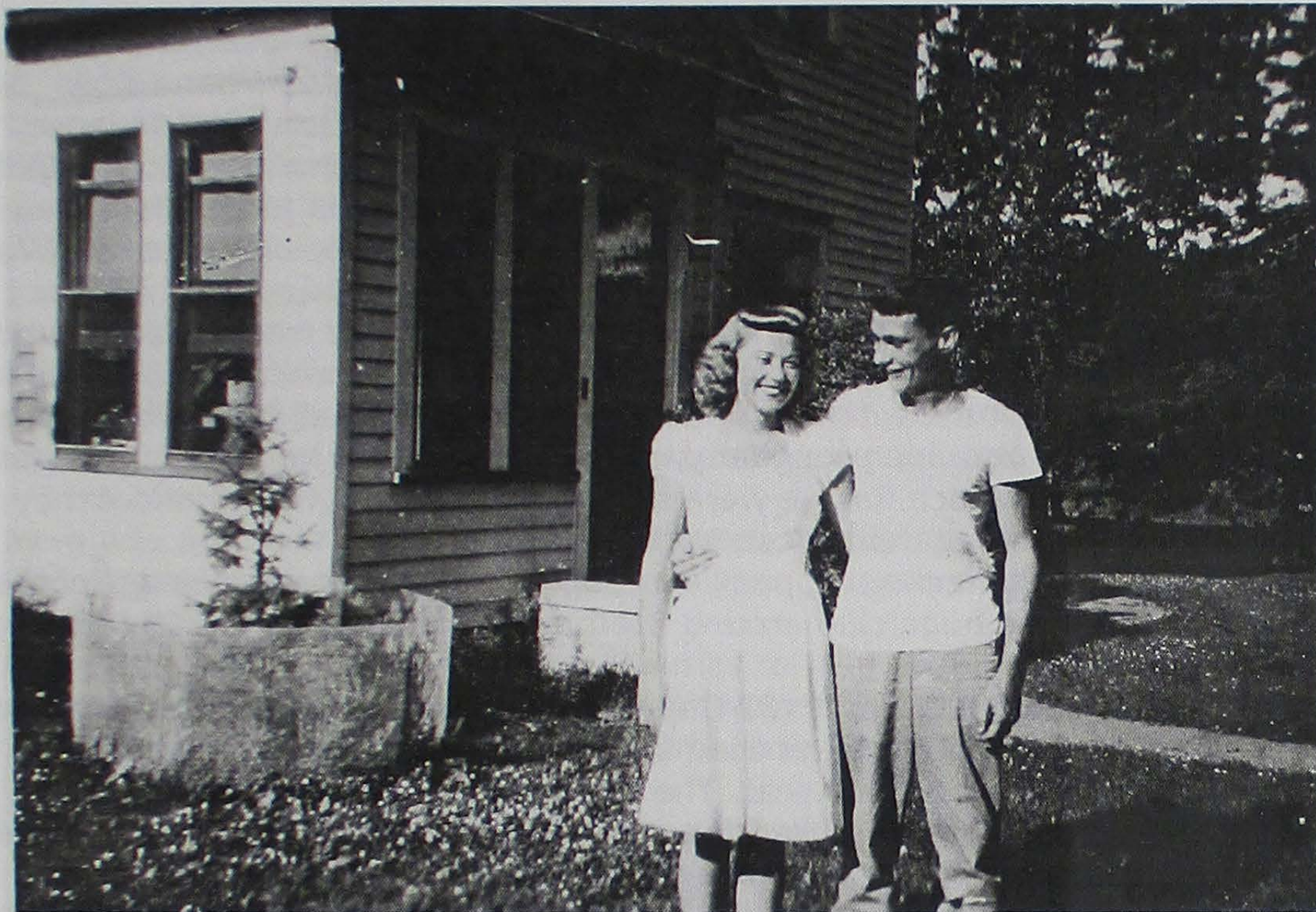
"Robert Clark" . . . "Kenneth Craig" . . . high school home room roll call, '41. Ken, Jeep, Eddie Gibb, Jim Warren and Bob were at Camp Dodge in January, '43, in the largest contingent from Story County. Ken had been a medic with the Fourth Division. He had taken part in the Normandy invasion, liberation of Paris and escaped death in the Battle of the Bulge. Ken and Pauline Larson had continued corresponding. Both Kenny and Bob were scheduled to go to Okinawa in preparation for the invasion of Japan following their 30-day leaves.



**Kenny is at left, wearing his combat boots.  
Next is Pauline, Sharlene Morris and Bob.**



We met at Tom's Grill, the business Dad had renovated back in the 30s. I joked with a very attractive waitress named Sharlene Morris, who lived northeast of Nevada on the family farm. Ken borrowed a '32 Chevy. We double dated, going to dances at Riverview Park in Des Moines. He and Pauline decided to get married. I was best man that sunny Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, at the Larson family home in Roland. The next day, August 6, 1945, the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, ending WWII. I later served as godfather to their first child, Cindy.



**Pauline Larson and Kenny Craig, Summer of 1945.**

I arrived back at Jeff Barracks late the first day of September. There were repeated rumors that the Japs were about to surrender. I dug into my notes and found a St. Louis phone number for Betty Price. She and her younger brother, Bill, were in school with my brothers and me. They drew crowds doing the jitterbug at the Nevada Sports Club dances. Betty had worked at the ordnance plant with Beverly and Marilyn then was in airlines school at Kansas City with Beverly.

It was dark by the time I finished checking in and left the barracks. I took a streetcar into St. Louis. On a coin phone I finally reached Betty at work across the Mississippi at Eastern Airlines in East St. Louis. She had also heard the news that the next day was to be V-J Day. She would get off work. I



arranged to meet her at her apartment the next evening. "Take the 'Kingshighway' streetcar," she said. "It's one word. Kingshighway."

I went back to the barracks. As I entered I was shocked to see several Negro soldiers, a first for me. Truman had integrated the armed forces.

About mid-afternoon I went out, purchased a fifth of bourbon and took a streetcar to Kingshighway. Carrying my bottle in a brown paper sack, I located Betty's apartment. It was still daylight when she and I walked back to Kingshighway. Traffic jammed the streets. No streetcars could get through. We stood on the corner looking around and wondering what to do.

Suddenly we heard a horn honking and voices calling, "Wanna ride downtown?" Three middle-aged Negro men were calling us from a slow moving white convertible sedan. They motioned to us. Betty and I glanced at each other and ran to the car, got in and rode to the downtown Cotton Club.

Betty and I sat at a table back from the dance floor in a darkened area and ordered 7-up setups. I didn't worry about people seeing my bottle. We caught each other up on the latest news, danced, joked and laughed away the night. The war was over! I kept thinking I should be with Beverly on this special occasion. Being with a mutual friend was a godsend.

Late that night a Lieutenant J. G. in the navy, who had been sitting at a table behind us with his young lady, approached saying he and his girl friend had noticed how much fun we were having and asked if we minded if they joined us. We invited them to sit at our table.

The four of us, feeling no pain, thoroughly enjoyed the remainder of the night, leaving the huge club around 3:00 a.m. The Lieutenant offered us a ride home.

He had parked his 2-door '32 Chevy on the lot of a nearby filling station. When the four of us merrily arrived at the lot, it was filled with cars. Betty and I crawled into the back seat. The Lieutenant and his girlfriend sat in front. He started the car, pulled forward as far as possible, turned the front wheels, backed up, turned the wheels again in an effort to get out, then backed up, striking something. We all looked back and roared with laughter. He had knocked over a gas pump. We drove out of the filling station driveway and onto the street, laughing hilariously as we went.

The war was over.



## CHAPTER 7

I shipped from Jeff barracks to Sioux Falls Air Base, South Dakota. Sioux Falls held such vivid memories of Beverly. Thousands of airmen jammed the base, all like me, waiting to be discharged. There were more military personnel on the base than civilians in the entire city of Sioux Falls.

Early in September, Rosey received a medical discharge, registered at the University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana and took advantage of the brand new GI Bill of Rights.

I saw an ad on a bulletin board at the base PX for help at the local meat packing plant. I went to work there, wading through knee high blood in tall rubber boots. With the money I earned at the packing plant, I put a down payment on a 1937 Buick Century and was burdened with monthly payments. Labor Day passed, then Halloween. November was well under way. I was still waiting to be discharged.

Mom was not well. Dad asked the Red Cross to help speed my discharge. A telegram arrived from the Red Cross, explaining Mom's illness and requesting the military to discharge me.

Grandma Dotts went from Omaha to Ames to stay with Mom. They both returned to Grandma's house in Omaha. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945, I received my honorable discharge and headed for Omaha in the '37 Buick.



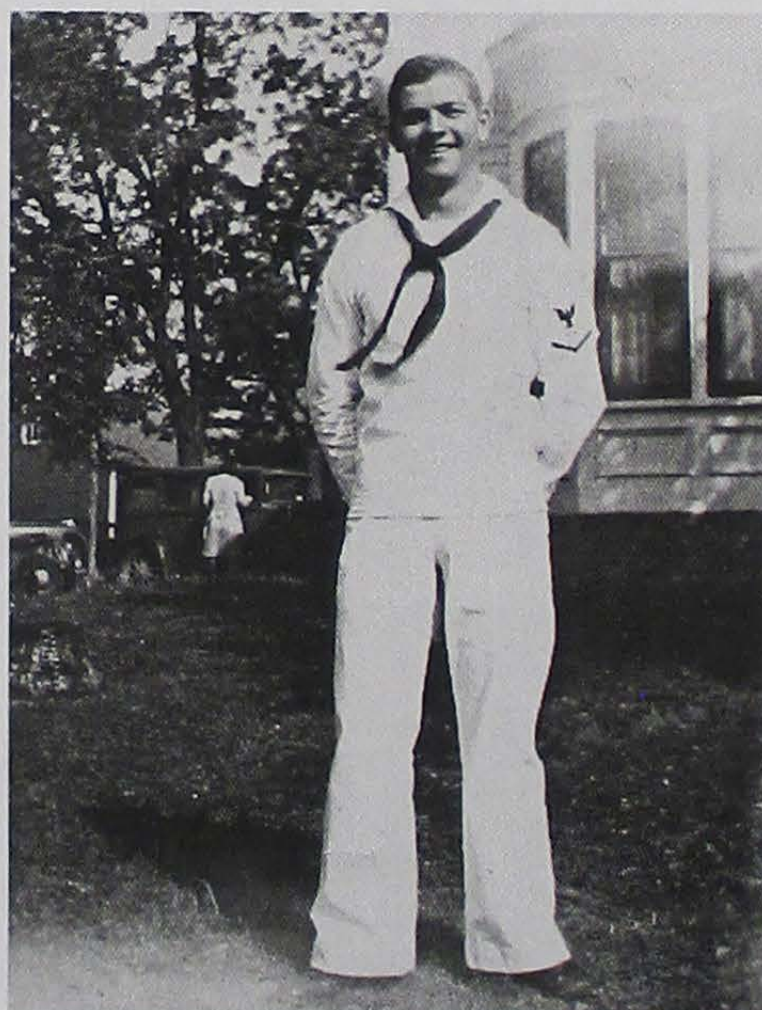
**Vera Clark with her mother, Orpha (Wolf) Dotts.**



Mom, Bruce and four year-old Roger were at Grandma's when I arrived, still wearing my air corps uniform. The next day, Paul, in the Seabees, arrived in his naval uniform. Bruce, Paul and I were seated, with Maxine, Grandma, Mom and Rog at Grandma's kitchen table.



**Bruce, in Marine Corps uniform and R. J. in front of Uncle Gerald's Pontiac at Grandma Dotts' home, Omaha, NE., '44.**



**Paul in Navy uniform.**



"Well," said Maxine, "we're so glad you boys made it through that awful war."

Simultaneously the three of us stood up, bowed and said, "Thank-you." We sat down. We hadn't been together in years, but were still synchronized.

The snow I had experienced from Sioux Falls to Omaha the night before crunched beneath our feet as Aunts Maxine and Leone, Uncle Gerald, Bruce, Paul and I walked to a nearby tavern that evening. We enjoyed beer made right there in Omaha, talked of old times, our various war experiences and danced the night away. Harry James' new hit, "Seems Like Old Times," played many times on the jukebox. I thought of old times with Beverly, wishing she could have been with me to plan a future.

Paul returned to his California base. I drove Mom, Bruce and Rog to Iowa. Dad had bought an older home in Ames with the allotments Paul and I designated. I lived with the family at 916 Kellogg, but still had car payments.

After the holidays, I enrolled at Iowa State College in Ames, on the GI Bill. Dad had gone to school and instructed there in the twenties. By the end of the quarter, I realized I was on the wrong track. I didn't re-register.

Saturday nights, Bruce, Paul and I were joined in a booth at Mabel Lane's State Café on Main Street by Jeep, still an air corps officer, and his brother, Stanley, recently discharged after four years in the army.

Paul had been able to visit Mom's cousin, Doris Hopkins, and her husband, "Hoppy," in California while stationed near their Santa Rosa home. In the spring of 1946, Paul and I set out in the Buick for a Santa Rosa visit.

Bob De Hoet had been discharged from the Marines and was at Ghorst, Washington, northwest of Seattle, where his family had moved during the war. Smiley returned from the Marines and went back to work for the Iowa Highway Commission in Ames. While out west, we intended to visit De Hoets.

Concentrating on my car payment, I went to work on construction with Paul, who was a genuine carpenter, near Santa Rosa. In no time, the job was unionized and we either had to join the carpenter's union or leave the job.

We decided to drive on north to visit the De Hoet family. Paul, Bob and I spent the summer near the Canadian border, digging trenches for new home footings. Cars were still scarce from the wartime shortage. I sold the Buick at Tacoma and paid off the balance, leaving me a little extra cash.

The three of us returned to Ames and went to work at the local canning factory for low wages. In a short time, Bob and I led the workers on a strike for higher pay. That lost us our jobs.

The parents of an old high school friend, Deloris Knight, had opened a "Maid-Rite" café at the east end of Main Street in the early thirties. After the war, they were operating in a new red brick building on Main Street, just west of the Collegian Theater.

One Saturday, Smiley and I went in for two of the delicious maid-rite sandwiches. We spied four young ladies sitting in large booth, struck up a conversation and sat with them. As we joked and laughed, Smiley and I each centered on one of the recent high school graduates to ask out.



The two we selected were brunettes, each standing about 5'5". Smiley was interested in Ruth Kilborn who had brown eyes. I went for blue-eyed Margaret Ann Matters, nicknamed, "Mickey." I liked her middle name, "Ann," which was also Beverly's middle name as well as my sister Marj's.

We commenced taking the ladies out in the "Blue Bolt," my light blue '32 Model B Ford convertible roadster. In the fall of '46, Smiley and I enrolled in college. He decided on Simpson, where Beverly had spent two years. I could take broadcasting courses at the State University of Iowa in Iowa City. We got back to Ames on weekends and double dated with Ruth and Mick.

Bob Phillips, who had been kicked out of high school dramatic club with Duane Dirksen and me in 1940, returned from service. He had attended Iowa U. before being drafted and was in Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity. He invited me to dinner at his frat house. I accepted and was asked to pledge the fraternity. I endured the "rushing" procedure, hell week and became a Sig Ep "active." I performed my ventriloquist act quite often and was elected Social Chairman, a fraternity officer, presenting some of the school's most sensational parties, even getting full-page spreads in the city's newspaper.

I went home for the holidays. Mick told me she was pregnant. Paul and Ruth stood up for us at the Christian Church in Ames, January 5, 1947.

Mick went back to Iowa City with me. I got my name on the list for veterans housing and waited. I had classes all morning and worked afternoons and Saturdays, loading and unloading trucks for the university. Mick went to work part-time at University Hospital. Her dad came to Iowa City often, insisting upon taking her back home and interrupting her work. A mobile home became available under the veterans housing program. We quickly grabbed it at \$22 a month.

Paul asked Smiley if he'd mind if he dated Ruth. Smiley gave his okay.

Mick suffered a miscarriage. In time, she recovered and went back to work. Her dad continued to drive to Iowa City and take her home with him. It was obvious to me, Mick was uncomfortable attending fraternity functions.

After she returned from a trip to Ames with her daddy, I told Mick the next time she went home with him, she should just stay there. It happened again. When she returned, I had moved back into the fraternity house. I paid for the divorce and placed Beverly's wallet sized picture on the desk in my room.

The summer of 1948, I wrote a dramatic radio script about a WWII B-17 crew titled, "Homecoming," as an assignment of our instructor, Dr. H. Clay Hershberger, Dean of Liberal Arts. H. Clay was a middle-aged man who had directed dramas in New York for the nationally popular CBS Playhouse. He insisted upon operating the control board for my on-air production, since the script called for such a wide selection of sound effects and music.

I wrote Aunt Fern in Pleasantville, setting out the radio frequency of WSUI, the university AM station, and the time my live drama was to be broadcast. It was a rather touching story and was selected to be repeated every Memorial Day on WSUI.



I graduated February 5, 1949 and wanted to try my luck in Hollywood as a network radio scriptwriter. Brother Dan and Bill Price were in San Antonio. I hitchhiked down. Dan and I hitchhiked to Hollywood. It rained constantly. Movie stars stood in line at the employment office. Dad sent me \$20. Iona met me for a movie. I was having no job luck. Dan and I hitchhiked home.

For years I had occasional dreams in which I happened into Beverly, always east of the Trailways bus depot on Mulberry Street in Des Moines.

I got a job with a Des Moines finance company, but refused to repossess a veteran's car, certain he would pay up if given more time. I was out on the streets again looking for work. Why couldn't I find work in my field? I had a B. A. degree and had gained valuable experience at Iowa U. in radio work, especially dramatic script writing.

I pounded the Des Moines pavement a lot and was walking east on a downtown street on a hot sunny day in August, 1949, when I heard my name called repeatedly by loud female voices. I looked toward the street. A black 1938 Chevrolet 4-door had pulled over to the nearby curb. I couldn't believe my eyes! Beverly and Marilyn were shouting from the right rear window! I hurried over. Beverly opened the door. I got in the back seat with them. Beverly introduced me to Bill Pitt, her husband, who was driving. He pulled away from the curb and drove slowly as we talked rapidly. The same old warm relaxed feeling swept over me.

Beverly told me she had a second daughter, born the month before. She had named her new little girl Edythe Emily after Edythe Danielson, our mutual ordnance plant friend. She had been in Pleasantville when my letter to Aunt Fern arrived, telling her of my dramatic radio production. She had listened to it with her aunt. After driving a couple blocks, Bill pulled the car to the curb. I stepped out. We said, "Goodbye" through the window. The three of them drove off toward Pleasantville.

There was that devastating hole in my stomach again. I stood on the Des Moines city sidewalk, looking all around to make sure I was not in a dream. "For God's sake," I said to myself, "you're on Mulberry Street east of the Trailways bus station and Beverly was really here!" Sleigh bells were everywhere.

Commencing in June, 1958, I went to work as a radio-TV-film writer for the U. S. Census Bureau, headquartered at Suitland, Maryland, just across the line from the District of Columbia. I had gained considerable experience in radio, TV and film script writing and production at the Office of Price Stabilization, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Red Cross National Headquarters and two Civil Defense Survival Plan Committees - one headquartered in D. C. and the other in Richmond, Virginia.





**Bob and specially created dummy, Corky, entertained on TV in Washington, D. C. The Kingston Trio and Patsy Cline appeared on the same program.**



I had last heard from Beverly after she and her family moved to California. In the spring of 1960, Aaron von Struve, Public Information Director at the Census Bureau, as a favor for the job I had accomplished, asked how I'd like to work in Hollywood a few weeks. Of course, I accepted the generous offer. I wrote to Aunt Fern for Beverly's address, telling her I was about to head that way. In a few days I received Beverly's address and phone number.

Shortly after getting off the plane, I phoned Beverly. I was thrilled just hearing her voice. We set a time for me to visit. When I got to her home in the foothills above Hollywood, Burbank and Glendale, the three girls were all dressed up. Sandy haired Sue was 14. Emily, nearly 11, had black hair, and the little one, blond Mari Ann, was just two. They all had their mom's pretty blue eyes and dimples. If Beverly had aged I sure didn't notice. We talked of me working in her "old stompin' grounds," Washington, D. C. It was so difficult leaving. I promised, if I could arrange it, I would call back.

But I was sent to Sacramento. I stayed with my Uncle Roy and Aunt Grace in California's capital city while calling upon newspapers, TV and radio stations throughout the northern California area with promotional materials supporting the 1960 Census of Population and Housing. I flew back to D. C. from Sacramento and continued to correspond with Beverly.

12 years passed. In the spring of '72, I drove from Florida to Plano, Texas, and helped my sister, Kay, drive with her three kids to California. At Newport Beach, the Texas gang joined sister Pat's gang. They took a motor home to Mexico for a few days. Kay left her car with me. I drove up to Tujunga and called upon Beverly, arriving at night. She was home alone.

Her husband, Bill, was at his favorite tavern. We decided to join him. Beverly sat in the front seat beside me, as during the war years. I parked near the tavern.

"This might be the only opportunity I'll ever have to tell you this," I commenced. "Do you remember comin' to Sioux Falls the summer of '44?" She thought back and finally said, "Oh, sure."

"Do ya remember askin' me to marry you?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"I know I didn't respond right. We were gettin' ready to go overseas into combat. Marriage just didn't seem to have a place. But, after you went back to D. C. I thought it over and decided gettin' married was exactly the thing to do. I had a leave comin' after gunnery school at Yuma. I got my commanding officer to put in for an airplane priority. It came through. I was goin' to surprise ya by flyin' to D. C. and take ya up on your proposal."

"Really?"

"Yep. The squadron took up a collection for the guy who'd be home the shortest time . . . and they gave the money to me. I had leave time comin'. I had the money and the plane priority." I paused. "Then your letter came."

"Oh, Bob."

She leaned into me. I slipped my arms around her.



"I went for a walk . . . alone . . . cried like a baby."

"Oh . . . I'm so sorry."

"I've always wanted you to know. Glad we finally got this opportunity."

I kissed her and melted as our lips pressed together. Hers were the same warm and soft lips I had remembered. I was back in heaven for just a few seconds.

I spent the night with Beverly and Bill, ate Beverly's cooking the next morning and headed for Orange County to visit my sisters who lived near each other. Marj and her family lived at Costa Mesa. Pat and her family lived nearby at Newport Beach, a few doors south of Iowa-born John Wayne.

Beverly and I corresponded. She informed me she would be with her daughter, Mari Ann, in Colorado when she gave birth to her first child.

I drove from Florida to Westminster, a suburb north of Denver. Mom and brother Gary lived there. Dad was building a home on the Poudre River northwest of Fort Collins.

Paul and his family also lived in Westminster. He had married Ruth Kilborn on Mom's birthday, June 26, 1947. They had three girls and a boy.

Bruce and Dan and their families lived in Aurora. Bruce had married our former Route 3 neighbor, Helen Lee. She had two children from a previous marriage. Bruce and Helen had a daughter and son. Dan had two boys and a girl. His wife, Dody, was from Boone, Iowa. Dan was left a paraplegic, resulting from a Missouri vehicle accident in 1960 on his way to visit me.

Emily, Beverly's second daughter, lived at Colorado Springs. Her husband was an airman stationed there. They had a daughter and a son.

When Beverly arrived from California she called me from Mari Ann's home in Denver. I drove over to see them. Beverly was her usual sparkling self. I hadn't seen Mari Ann since she was a little girl in the spring of 1960.

Mari Ann's husband, Ken Patterson, was stationed at a Denver air base. She planned giving birth at Fitzsimmons military hospital in Aurora, a suburb east of Denver. I spent all the time I could with Beverly. We had plenty of Colorado relatives to visit. Mari Ann had a bouncing baby boy they named "Jake."

When it came time for Beverly to head back to California, my VW bug was attached to a tow bar behind her Monte Carlo. I first lived in Orange County near my sisters, but soon moved north to be near Beverly. I went to work for a radio station at Victorville, then landed a job on a business magazine at Burbank, much nearer Beverly, who lived in the foothills at Sunland.

In the spring of 1978 Beverly divorced Bill.

On December 24, 1978, following the regular Sunday service at Foothill Christian Church in La Crescenta, California, Beverly and I were married. It was Christmas Eve, 35 years after we had become engaged.





**December 24, 1978**



Sue, Emily and Mari Ann served as bridesmaids. Sister, Pat, drove up from Newport Beach with her 20-year old son, Kirk, who stood up for me.

Emily worked for me on the magazine until her new husband's work took them to Australia. Mari Ann took Emily's place at the magazine.

I longed to return to Iowa. The following July, I landed a job with the weekly newspaper in Nevada, nine miles east of Ames. I bought a 20-year old Ford truck and drove it, loaded with Beverly's furniture, back to Iowa. Beverly towed my Beetle behind her Monte Carlo.

She was immediately hired to work part-time with the Council on Aging and soon knew more people in my home county than I did. Her life in Story County would fill volumes. She was the most loved person I've ever known.



**From left: Bob, Pauline and Kenny. Beverly managed Nevada's Senior Center, where a number of men, recalling the past, referred to Pauline as "the prettiest girl in Story County." Kenny's response: "Let 'em eat their hearts out!"**





**Bob and Beverly in the early nineties.**





**Hilarity set in when the couples got together.  
Pauline, Bob and Beverly**



**Pauline Craig sports a red hat for ladies red hat day at a senior luncheon in Nevada. Pauline was the first person Bob phoned after Beverly's doctor informed them Beverly's time on earth was nearly at an end.**



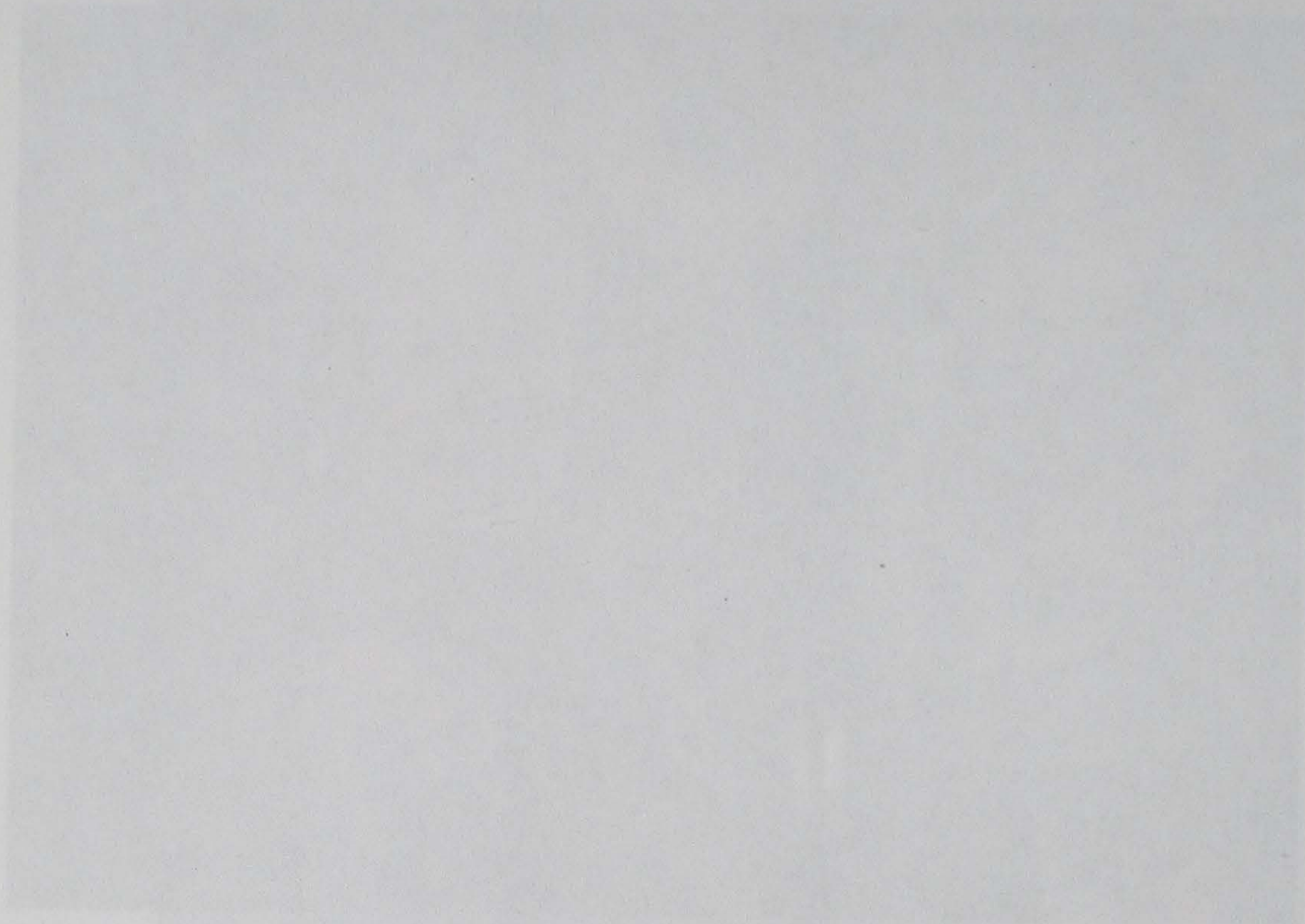
Pancreatic cancer took her from us the evening of March 9, 2000. Her ashes are buried at Pleasantville cemetery.



**Bob snapped this picture of Beverly with the sunflowers in front of their home at 1234 K Avenue, Nevada, Iowa. She chose this snapshot to appear with the obituary she wrote for herself.**

I still hear sleigh bells.





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